THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

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Translated by

HARI PRASAD SHASTRI

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BALA KANDA

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INTRODUCTION

WESTERN culture is only just beginning to look beyond the Roman and Greek civilizations for new inspiration. Even so, it is a little surprising that, although the mighty epics of the Iliad and the Odyssey are widely known and loved, only a few scholars have studied their Hindu counterparts known as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. In fact no good complete[1] modern English translation of the Ramayana exists, and the best of those made in the last half of the 19th century are unobtainable outside the larger libraries.

The Ramayana is a work of great antiquity attributed to the illustrious Sage Valmiki. Its date of composition cannot be fixed with any certainty, particularly as, in common with other Sanskrit classics, it was not at first committed to writing, but was passed on from singer to singer. This process also accounts for the fact that the various versions (*Sakhas*) of the poem that have come down to us differ slightly in context. The interesting fact is that the scholars are agreed that the Ramayana is the grandly conceived and executed masterpiece of one poet, and not a collection of stories from many sources, loosely gathered together.

Unfortunately we know very little about the Rishi Valmiki, whose title 'Adikavi' (First poet) and pre-eminence in Sanskrit verse has never been seriously challenged to this day. He was a robber chief in a forest in Northern India and on one occasion waylaid two ascetics for the purpose of plundering them. The travellers, however, spoke to him with kindness, and offered him the spiritual truth in lieu of the gold and silver which they did not possess. Convinced of their sincerity and on their advice, Valmiki changed his mode of life and became a devotee of Shri Ramachandra, the Seventh Incarnation of God (Vishnu)

[1] The version of Ramayana included in *Hindu Scriptures* is a much abbreviated edition of the original, most of the legends being omitted.

on earth. After a long period of meditation on the form and virtues of Shri Rama, it is said that he was granted a vision of Rama's life from beginning to end.

He gave expression to this unique experience, in Sanskrit verse, in the 24,000 *slokas* (48,000 lines) known as the Ramayana. The *sloka* is a specific metre which the poet himself discovered, as is told in a beautiful passage in the first book.

The poem is divided into seven books (*Kandas*) of unequal length, which may be very briefly summarised as follows :—

Book I. (*Bala-Kanda.*) King Dasaratha of Ayodhya (Oudh), performs a sacrifice in the hope of obtaining a son. At this time the Gods (*Devas*) are alarmed at the power acquired by the mighty Titan named Ravaṇa, who, by the practice of black magic had conquered almost all of the known world. King Dasaratha's prayer is answered and his three wives bear four sons, Rama, Bharata and the twins Lakshmana and Shatrughna, who are all partial incarnations of Shri Vishnu. Vishnu, however, manifests himself more fully in Shri Rama than in the other brothers. The boys grow up and Shri Rama wins as his bride, Sita, the daughter of King Janaka of the neighbouring kingdom of Videha.

Book II. (*Ayodhya-Kanda.*) King Dasaratha intends to proclaim Shri Rama heir-apparent, but the jealousy of his second queen, Kaikeyi, is aroused and she holds the king to a promise made formerly, that he would grant her two boons. The boons she now secures are the banishment of Shri Rama to the forest for fourteen years, and the installation of her own son Bharata as *Yuvaraja.*[1] According to the law of righteousness (*dharma*) a vow must be honoured, and Shri Rama calmly accepts the sentence of exile. He travels south to Chittrakuta in the Dandaka Forest with his wife Sita and his brother Lakshmana. King Dasaratha dies of grief and Bharata implores Shri Rama to return to the throne, but the latter adheres firmly to the vindication of his father's honour and the fulfilment of his vow.

Book III. (*Aranya-Kanda.*) After about ten years in the forest with her husband, Princess Sita is kidnapped by the Titan Ravana, and taken by him to his capital, Lanka (the modern Ceylon).

[1] *Yuvaraja* = heir-apparent.

Book IV. (*Kishkindhya-Kanda.*) Rama and Lakshmana in pursuit of Ravana and to rescue Sita, enlist the aid of King Sugriva, leader of the monkey tribe, whose chief minister Hanuman becomes the foremost devotee and servant of Shri Rama. Help also comes from Vibishana, brother of Ravana, who has openly disapproved of the Titan king's conduct, and warned him of the retribution he may expect for his unrighteous actions.

Book V. (*Sundara-Kanda.*) The monkey armies reach the south coast of India, and, bridging the straits, gain entry into Lanka.

Book VI. (*Lanka-Kanda.*) After a series of pitched battles, Lanka is captured and Ravana is slain by Shri Rama. Sita demonstrates her purity and faithfulness to her husband, by successfully undergoing the ordeal by fire. The period of fourteen years' exile is by now completed, and Shri Rama returns with his consort, his brothers and allies, to the capital Ayodhya, where he begins a long and glorious reign.

Book VII. (*Uttara-Kanda.*) This ' later section ' or epilogue, describes the doubts raised in the minds of the citizens concerning the purity of Sita, and how they compel Shri Rama to send her to Valmiki's hermitage in the forest where she gives birth to twin sons, Kusha and Lava. When these boys grow up, they return to Ayodhya and are recognized by Shri Rama, who subsequently brings Sita back to share the ruling of the kingdom with him.

This in outline is the story of the Ramayana, which, in the poetic grandeur of the original, as well as in the later Hindi work on the same theme by Goswami Tulsidas, has exerted a tremendous influence on the men and women of India. It is not only poetry of unsurpassed dramatic power and brilliance, it is a treasure-house of information on rhetoric, medicine, geology, botany, geography and every facet of the ancient civilization, with which learned scholars may interest themselves. For every Hindu, Shri Rama and Sita are the ideal man and woman, the model husband and wife. Shri Rama is an incarnation of God, the One all-pervading Principle of Truth and Intelligence, and what higher pattern for one's life could be chosen than this man of perfect virtue, a lover

of truth, compassionate, just, benevolent, valorous and *chivalrous* ?

The story may also be taken as an allegory. Symbolically Rama and Ravana represent the forces of light and darkness operating in the human heart, as well as in the world. Truth, benevolence, mercy and righteousness are the forces of Light which are opposed by greed, lust, love of pleasure and power, anger and egoity. The real triumph of man means conquest of the forces of darkness. In India a festival is celebrated each year on the day traditionally held to be that on which Ravana fell and the rule of tyranny, injustice, savagery and unrighteousness ended.

Mention has already been made of Tulsidas' later Hindi epic on the life of Shri Rama, which is probably the most widely read of all in the present day. One version of the story also forms an episode in the Mahabharata and another comparatively modern treatment of it is the Adhyatma Ramayana ascribed to the Sage Vyasa.

The Sage Valmiki himself wrote a long metaphysical classic known as the Maharamayana or Yoga Vasishtha, which deals with the inner development of Shri Rama as opposed to his outer deeds and which remains one of the most authoritative and respected philosophical treatises of Vedanta.

The life of Shri Rama has entered into the consciousness of the Indian people, and much art and literature, such as Bhababhuti's dramas, draw their inspiration from it. The words of Brahma in the Ramayana have proved so far to be no idle boast: "So long as mountains and rivers have place on the earth, the story of the Ramayana will be told in the world."

The aim of the translator is to make the story known to English readers in a complete form, the first part of which is published in this volume. Although it is not possible to reproduce the beauty of the original poetic form, the true spirit of Valmiki's masterpiece is here preserved and for those who have vision, the whole significance of its spiritual purpose will be apparent.

BOOK I

BALA KANDA

CHAPTER I

Shri Narada relates to Valmiki the story of Rama

THE Sage Valmiki,[1] chief among the munis[2] and the most eloquent of men, constantly engaged in the practice of self-control and the study of the holy scriptures, enquired of Shri Narada :[3]—

" Who is there in the world to-day, endowed with excellent and heroic qualities, who is versed in all the duties of life, grateful, truthful, firm in his vows, an actor of many parts, benevolent to all beings, learned, eloquent, handsome, patient, slow to anger, one who is truly great ; who is free from envy and when excited to wrath can strike terror into the hearts of celestial beings ? O Sage, I would hear of such a man from thee, who art able to describe him to me."

Narada, acquainted with the past, the present and the future, pleased with the words of the Sage Valmiki, answered him saying :—

" Rare indeed are those, endowed with the qualities thou hast enumerated, yet I can tell thee of such a one. Born in the family of Ikshwaku,[4] he is named Rama ;[4] one renowned, fully self-controlled, valorous and illustrious, the Lord of All. Wise, conversant with the ethical code, eloquent, fortunate, a slayer of his foes, broad-shouldered, long-armed, possessing a conch-shaped neck and prominent chin, eminent in archery, with a muscular body, arms extending to the knees, and a noble head and brow ; of mighty prowess ; possessing well-

[1] Valmiki. Once a robber chief, became later a fully illumined sage, author of *Ramayana*.
[2] Muni. A holy sage, a pious and learned person.
[3] Narada. A great rishi, son of Brahma, the Creator. Many hymns of the Rig-veda are attributed to him.
[4] Ikshwaku. Son of Manu, founder of the Solar race of kings, who reigned in Ayodhya.

proportioned limbs and skin of bluish tint,[1] one renowned for his virtue ; of prominent eyes, deep-chested, bearing auspicious marks ; one who protects those who take refuge in him and is ever-mindful of the good of those dependent on him ; true to his promises, benevolent to his subjects, omniscient, renowned for his good deeds, pure, and ever responsive to devotion ; meditating on his own essence.

" Equal to Brahma, the Protector of his people, pleasing to look upon ; supporting the universe ; the destroyer of those who contravene the moral code ; the inspirer of virtue ; the giver of special grace to his devotees and to those who duly observe sacrificial rites and are charitable ; conversant with the essence of the Vedic philosophy ; an adept in the science of warfare ; skilled in the scriptural law ; of infallible memory ; beloved of all ; of courteous disposition ; incapable of cowardice ; acquainted with the laws of this world as also of the other worlds.

"As the rivers hasten to the ocean, so do men of virtue ever approach him.

" Equal to Vishnu[2] in valour ; grateful to the sight as the full moon ; when stirred to righteous anger, resembling all-consuming death ; in patience like the earth, in generosity like Kuvera ;[3] in truthfulness the personification of virtue. Such are his great qualities—Rama, the beloved heir of King Dasaratha, possessing every excellent attribute, benevolent to all, devoted to the welfare of every living being."

His father, King Dasaratha, made preparations to install him as his regent, but the Queen Kaikeyi, claiming the boons formerly promised to her, demanded the exile of Rama and the enthronement of her own son Bharata. The king held by his promise and by the ties of honour, sent his son Rama, whom he loved as his own life, into exile. Obeying the command of his royal sire, and in order to gratify Kaikeyi, Shri Rama went to the forest.

The son of Queen Sumitra, Prince Lakshmana, inspired by affection and humility, followed his brother Rama into exile.

[1] bluish-tint. The Incarnations or Divine Descents called Avataras are said to have the colour of a new-born cloud.
[2] Vishnu. The Lord as Maintainer and Supporter of the Universe.
[3] Kuvera. The God of wealth.

The daughter of King Janaka, an incarnation of Lakshmi,[1] endowed with the highest feminine virtues, seeing Prince Lakshmana accompanying Rama, obedient to her lord, followed him as Venus follows the moon.

Accompanied for some leagues by King Dasaratha and his people, Rama dismissed the chariot on reaching the town of Shringavera on the banks of the Ganges, and commanded the minister Sumantra to return to the capital.

Here the prince met his beloved Guha, the chief of the Chandalas,[2] accompanied by whom, with Lakshmana and Sita, he crossed the river Ganges and entered the forest, arriving at length at the Chittrakuta mountain described by the Sage Bharadwaja. Rama, Lakshmana and Sita dwelt happily in the forest like devas[3] or gandharvas.[4]

Overwhelmed with grief at the separation from his sons and lamenting their absence, the king departed this life, while Rama was dwelling on the Chittrakuta mountain.

The holy sages offered the throne, left vacant on the death of King Dasaratha, to Prince Bharata, who declined it, not desiring the kingdom. Setting forth to the forest where Shri Rama dwelt, in order to propitiate him, he approached that hero of truth with humility and directing his attention to the code of justice with which he was conversant, requested Rama to return and govern the kingdom.

The magnanimous, handsome and mighty Rama refused to accept the throne, preferring to carry out the command of his sire and, presenting Prince Bharata with his sandals as a symbol of authority, repeatedly exhorted him to return to the capital.

Shri Bharata, touching the feet of Rama in submission, departed and began to rule the dominion from the town of Nandigrama, while eagerly awaiting the return of his brother.

The sages and hermits, who dwelt in the forest, constantly harassed by asuras,[5] approached Shri Ramachandra to ask for his protection—Shri Rama agreed to slay the evil asuras in order to preserve the Sages who had sought his help. The holy

[1] Lakshmi. The consort of Shri Vishnu. q.v.
[2] Chandalas. Outcast.
[3] Devas. Gods or celestial beings, literally "shining ones".
[4] Gandharvas. Heavenly musicians.
[5] Asuras. A race of demons.

men, whose appearance equalled the fire in lustre, heard of Shri Rama's resolve and were assured by him of his protection.

The female asura Shurpanakha, who could assume various forms at will, was overpowered and disfigured by Rama and Lakshmana. All the wicked rakshasas[1] came led by Khara, Dushana and Trishira, to engage in combat with Shri Rama, and were slain by him. Shri Rama slew fourteen thousand rakshasas who dwelt in that forest. Hearing of the slaughter of the rakshasas, King Ravana transported with rage, took with him Maricha, a demon like himself. Maricha, knowing the superior strength of Rama, sought to dissuade Ravana from entering into combat with him, but Ravana who was marked down by destiny, disregarded the advice and went with Maricha to Shri Rama's abode. There, Maricha lured Shri Rama and Lakshmana away from the hermitage, and Ravana, having slain the vulture Jatayu, carried Sita away.

Learning from the dying Jatayu of the abduction of the daughter of the King of Mithila, Shri Rama was overwhelmed with grief and began to mourn.

Having performed the funeral rites of the vulture, while wandering in search of Sita, he encountered an asura named Kabandha whose form was menacing and terrible.

Shri Rama slew him and then performed the funeral rites whereupon his soul ascended to heaven. While passing to the celestial sphere, Kabandha spoke to Rama of Shabari, a female ascetic, and entreated him to visit her. Shri Rama, the ever resplendent Destroyer of his foes, came to where Shabari dwelt and was duly worshipped by her.

On the banks of the Lake Pampa, Shri Rama met the monkey Hanuman who presented Sugriva to him. The mighty Rama related the whole of his story to him as far as the abduction of Shri Sita. Sugriva having listened to Shri Rama entered into the rite of friendship with him, witnessed by the fire. With full faith in Rama, Sugriva then recounted to him all the sufferings he had endured through his enmity with Bali[2] and the great daring of the latter. Then Shri Rama vowed to

[1] Evil spirits or fiends, enemies of the gods.
[2] Bali or Vali—a Titan King, son of Virochana, son of Prahlada.

slay Bali, but Sugriva, uncertain of Rama's prowess and desiring to test him, showed him the bones of the body of Dundhubi,[1] forming a heap as high as a mountain. With his foot, Rama kicked the heap to a distance of ten yojanas and, discharging an arrow, pierced seven palmyra trees, cleaving a mountain and with the shaft penetrating to the centre of the earth. Having witnessed this exploit, Sugriva was satisfied, and thereafter trusted Rama implicitly. In his company he passed through deep valleys to the town of Kishkindhya ; there, the yellow-eyed Sugriva roared like thunder. At this terrible sound, the powerful and valiant monkey chief, Bali, issued forth, disregarding the warning of his wife Tara, and engaged in combat with Sugriva.

As desired by Sugriva, Shri Rama slew Bali with a single arrow ; then he entrusted the government of Kishkindhya to Sugriva who now, as king of the monkey tribe, gathered his forces together and dispatched them to every quarter in search of Sita.

The vulture chief, the courageous Sampati, informed Hanuman where Sita was, whereupon the monkey leapt over the sea that lies between Bharatvarsh[2] and Lanka,[3] a distance of five hundred miles.

Entering the city of Lanka that was protected by Ravana, Hanuman beheld Sita, meditating on Rama in the ashoka garden. He there delivered Rama's ring to her and acquainted her with the welfare of her lord. Having revived the courage of Sita, he shattered the gate of the garden and slew seven sons of the counsellors of Ravana, five great captains and levelled Akshyakumara, the son of Ravana, to the dust. Then he suffered himself to be taken captive.

Knowing he could not be subdued by the weapon granted by Brahma to Ravana, yet acknowledging the power of its blessing,[4] Hanuman allowed himself to be imprisoned, suffering many indignities. Subsequently he burnt the whole of Lanka, only sparing the place where Sita dwelt.

[1] Dundhubi—a giant.
[2] Bharatvarsh—India.
[3] Lanka—Ceylon.
[4] The God Brahma had given Ravana a weapon which entangled everyone on whom it was used so that they could not escape. It was fitting, therefore, that Hanuman, though not subject to it, should acknowledge the god's power.

Returning to deliver his welcome tidings, he respectfully circumambulated the mighty Rama and recounted in detail how he had found Sita.

Setting out in the company of Sugriva and others, Rama reached the sea. There he created a tempest by his shining arrows and the Lord of the waters, Sumudra, appeared before him. Under his direction, Nala threw a bridge over the sea. Crossing the sea by means of this bridge, Shri Rama entered Lanka, slew Ravana in battle and recovered Sita, but she being the subject of slander, was addressed by him with harsh words in the midst of the assembly. After hearing the words of Rama with forbearance, Sita entered a great fire. On the testimony of the fire god, Sita was proved to be innocent and Rama, adored by all the gods, was content.

The animate and inanimate beings of the three worlds,[1] the gods and the sages, gave thanks that Ravana had been slain by Shri Rama. Shri Rama enthroned Vibishana[2] as the king of the asuras and, being wholly satisfied, revived all the monkeys and asuras who had fallen in battle.

In the aerial chariot, Pushpaka, accompanied by Sugriva, Shri Rama, a devotee of truth, reached the hermitage of Bharadwaja. From there, he sent Hanuman to Prince Bharata, as his messenger and conversing with Sugriva again mounted the aerial chariot and arrived at Nandigrama.

Ever obedient to his father, Shri Rama then cut off his matted locks and with Sita occupied the throne of Ayodhya.

Seeing Shri Rama occupying the throne, the people were happy and satisfied, virtuous and free from sickness, sorrow, famine or danger. None witnessed the death of his son; no woman became a widow and all were devoted to their husbands; there was no danger from tempests; none perished by water; nor was there any cause of fear from fire; fever and plague were unknown; there was no want, and no danger from thieves. Cities and villages were rich and prosperous; all lived happily as in the Satya Yuga.[3]

Shri Rama and Sita observed countless Vedic sacrifices and

[1] Bhur, bhuvah, swah. The lower, middle and upper worlds.
[2] Bibishana or Vibishana. Younger brother of Ravana, but a devotee of Rama.
[3] Satya-Yuga. The golden age.

gave much gold, and hundreds of thousands of cows in charity, thus preparing for themselves a place in the divine regions. Shri Rama added incalculably to the prosperity of the dynasty, and bestowed immense wealth on the brahmins. He employed his subjects in the duties of their respectives castes and ruled for eleven thousand years, after which he returned to his celestial abode, Vaikuntha.

He who reads the story of Rama, which imparts merit and purity, is freed from all sin. He who reads it with faith and devotion is ultimately worshipped together with his sons, grandsons and servants at his death.

A brahmin[1] reading this becomes proficient in the Vedas, and philosophy ; a kshatriya[1] becomes a king ; a vaishya[1] grows prosperous in trade ; a shudra,[1] on reading this will become great in his caste.

CHAPTER 2

Sage Valmiki creates the metrical form for the story

THE wise and eloquent Valmiki with his disciple, Bharadwaja, having listened to the words of Narada, was filled with wonder and worshipped Rama in his heart. He offered obeisance to Shri Narada, who craved permission to depart and on his request being granted he ascended through space to the heavens.

Narada, having departed, the great Muni Valmiki proceeded to the banks of the river Tamasa, which was close to the Ganges. Reaching that place and seeing the pure and limpid waters, Valmiki said to his disciple : " O Bharadwaja, behold how pure is the water of the holy river, verily it is clear and pleasant like the mind of a good man. O Child, set down the waterpot and fetch me my bark robe from the hermitage. I wish to bathe in the sacred stream, delay not."

Obedient to the command of his Guru,[2] the disciple brought

[1] The four traditional castes ; the priests, the warriors, the merchants and those who serve the other three.
[2] Guru. Traditional spiritual preceptor.

the raiment from the Sage's hermitage and returning speedily, offered it to him. Receiving the robe of bark from the hands of his disciple, the sage, with his senses fully controlled, girded it about him and while bathing repeated the traditional prayers, offering libations of water to his ancestors and the gods. Then he wandered about in the forest enjoying the beauties of nature.

Now the august sage, Shri Valmiki, beheld a pair of Krauncha[1] birds fearlessly disporting themselves in love. Soon after, a fowler stealing up unobserved, slew the male bird in the presence of the sage. The female bird, deprived of her yellow crested companion, who but now had been spreading his wings in the act of love to please her, perceiving him bleeding and crying out in distress, began to mourn.

The heart of the sage was filled with pity on seeing the bird struck down by the fowler. Touched by the lament of the female krauncha and incensed by the cruel act of the fowler, the sage said: "O Fowler, having killed the bird in the midst of the enjoyment of love with its mate, thou shalt never attain prosperity. Do not visit the forest for many years lest evil overtake thee."

Reflecting on the words he had addressed to the fowler and realising their implication, the sage said to himself: "What words are these that I have uttered, inspired by my compassion for the dying bird?"

The wise and learned sage reflected a moment, and then said to his disciple: "Grieving for the dying bird, I have recited this verse of four feet, each of equal syllables, which can be sung to the vina.[2] May it bring me renown and may no ill be spoken of me on account of this."

With great delight the disciple committed to memory the verse composed by his spiritual preceptor, who expressed his satisfaction at the skill of his pupil Bharadwaja. Bathing in the sacred river, according to the prescribed ritual, the sage returned to his hermitage, pondering over the matter. The humble and learned disciple Bharadwaja followed the great Sage, carrying his loshta filled with water.

On entering the hermitage, the sage worshipped the Lord

[1] Krauncha. Ardea jaculator, a species of heron.
[2] Vina. A musical stringed instrument.

and performed other rituals and having instructed his disciple in the tradition and the sacred history, passed into deep meditation. The Creator of the world, the Self-born, the four-faced and glorious Brahma at length appeared before the holy sage. Valmiki rose hastily, filled with astonishment, and welcoming the Deity in great humility, offered obeisance to Him. Leading Him to a seat, in profound reverence he poured forth libations of water as enjoined in the tradition, making enquiries as to His welfare. The Blessed Lord accepted the homage offered to Him and commanded the sage to be seated. Shri Valmiki occupied the place designated by Brahma and once more recollected his grief over the incident of the wicked fowler, who ruthlessly slew the bird that was so happy and cooing with delight. He recalled the grief of the female bird and read and re-read the lines :—

> " By the ignorant and wicked fowler, grief is born
> For he has wantonly slain the melodious krauncha."

Shri Brahma, seeing the sage afflicted and sorrowful, said to him : " O Great Sage, let these words spontaneously uttered by thee, inspired by the death of the krauncha, be poetry. Do thou describe the whole story of Rama, who is the essence of virtue and full of the highest attributes, in accordance with what thou hast heard from Shri Narada. Do thou narrate all the known and hitherto unknown deeds of Shri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana and the asuras. Whatever relates to King Dasaratha, his wives, city, palace, sayings, conduct and what he accomplished, will be revealed to thee by my favour. None of thy words will prove false. Do thou render into verse the sacred and delightful deeds of Rama. O Sage, as long as the mountains and rivers remain on the earth, so long will the story of Shri Rama endure. So long as the story of Rama endures, so long shalt thou abide in the higher regions."

Having uttered these words, Shri Brahma pondered awhile within Himself and then vanished from sight.

The great sage and his disciple were filled with amazement at this event, and reading the stanza again and again, their delight grew. Repeatedly reciting the couplet, composed by Valmiki, they realised that the holy sage had expressed his sorrow

in poetic form. Then Shri Valmiki meditated on the Lord within his soul and it occurred to him to relate the story of Rama in similar verse. For the good of the world, the illustrious and holy sage, therefore, began composing the life of Shri Rama in verse; that Rama, worthy of world-wide renown, who is both generous and charming. Shri Valmiki composed the story of the life of Rama and of the slaying of Ravana in beautiful and measured stanzas, a work of infinite merit.

CHAPTER 3

The deeds of Rama that will be described in the sacred poem

HAVING heard the story of the life of the sagacious Rama from the lips of Shri Narada which, when recounted, confers perfect righteousness on the hearer, the holy sage wished to know more concerning the sacred theme. Washing his hands and feet and drinking a little pure water, placing himself facing the east on a seat of kusha grass, with joined palms, he passed into profound meditation and in a vision beheld the history of Rama. Through the grace of Shri Brahma, the holy sage saw all that Rama, Sita and Lakshmana had experienced, observed and done. He witnessed in detail the life of Rama, who was truth incarnate and all that he had accomplished in the forest and other places.

By the power of spiritual meditation and yoga, the Sage Valmiki saw the whole past as clearly as if it were a fruit placed on the palm of his hand. Thus, having witnessed all, the most enlightened sage began to describe the life of Shri Rama in verse.

The history of Shri Rama, which confers righteousness, worldly prosperity and delight on the reader, which does not degrade the mind and grants release from sorrow, that story which charms the heart and is as full of lovely gems as is the sea, was rendered by Shri Valmiki, in the form in which Shri Narada had related it to him.

The birth of Rama, his valour, his benevolence to all men, his universal goodwill, his clemency, his pleasing looks, his

sweet disposition, his love of truth, his humility, his helpful services to the Sage Vishwamitra, the instruction given by the Sage Vishwamitra to him and his patient hearing of it; his breaking of the great bow; his marriage to Princess Sita; his controversy with Parasurama; the preparations for his coronation; a description of his great qualities; the opposition offered by Queen Kaikeyi to the coronation; his departure to the forest; the lament and death of King Dasaratha, the grief of the people of Ayodhya; Rama's speech with the ferryman; his farewell to Sumantra; his crossing of the Ganges; his visit to the holy Sage Bharadwaja; his departure for Chittrakuta on the instance of the sage; his dwelling in the leaf-thatched hut on Mount Chittrakuta; the grief of the king on Sumantra's return and the monarch's departure to heaven; the arrival of Shri Bharata at Chittrakuta to persuade Rama to return to his kingdom; his stay at the hermitage; his interview with Rama; the funeral rites of his sire; Rama's refusal to return; the receiving of Rama's sandals by Bharata as a symbol of authority; Bharata's installation of the symbol and his ruling of Ayodhya from Nandigrama; Shri Rama's visit to the Dandaka forest; his slaying of the wicked Virodha;[1] his interview with the Sage Sharabhanga; his arrival at the hermitage of Sutikshna; the meeting of Anasuya with Shri Sita and the imparting of teachings to her; the visit of the Sage Agastya; his residence at Panchavati; the meeting with Jatayu; the appearance of Shurparnakha; the conversation of Rama and Lakshmana with her; Shuparnakha's mutilation; the slaying of Khara, Dusana and Trishira; the arrival of Ravana; the slaying of Maricha; the abduction of Sita; Rama's lament on his separation from Sita; the slaying of Jatayu by Ravana; the meeting with Kabandha; the arrival at Lake Pampa; Rama's interview with Shabari; his arrival at the Rishyamukha mountain; his meeting with Hanuman; Rama's seal of friendship with Sugriva; his promise to destroy Bali; the combat between Bali and Sugriva; the slaying of Bali; the mourning of Tara; the installation of Sugriva; Shri Rama's sojourn on the mountain in the rainy season; Sugriva's exceeding of the stated time for his mission, Rama's anger against him; Lakshmana's delivery of the message

[1] Virodha. A man-eating demon.

to Sugriva ; Sugriva's visit to Rama ; his propitiation of Rama ; the organising of the monkey army ; the dispatch of the monkeys to find Sita's abode ; the description of the earth given to them ; the giving of Rama's ring to Hanuman ; the monkeys entry into the dark cave ; their fasting on the seashore in preparation for death ; their interview with Sampati, the king of the vultures ; his information respecting Lanka ; Hanuman's leap and his crossing of the sea ; the emergence of the Minaka hill from the ocean ; the slaying of the wicked female demon Singhika who imprisoned her victims by capturing their shadow ; the appearance of Lanka by night ; the entry of Hanuman into Lanka and his lonely reflections ; his seeing of the wicked Ravana and his aerial chariot Pushpaka ; Hanuman's entry into the inner apartments, where Ravana is drinking surrounded by women ; Hanuman's search for Sita and his beholding of the princess in the ashoka garden ; Ravana's entry into the garden and his solicitation of Sita ; her reproaches ; the threatening of Sita by the female asuras ; Trijata's description of her dream concerning the delivery of Shri Rama's ring to Sita by Hanuman ; the conversation on this matter ; the gift of the jewel to Hanuman by Sita ; the destruction of the grove by Hanuman ; the flight of the women asuras ; the slaying of Ravana's guards by Hanuman ; the capture of Hanuman and the burning of Lanka by him ; the re-crossing of the sea ; the eating of the fruits of the Madhu forest ; the words of consolation offered to Shri Rama by Hanuman and the delivery of Shri Sita's jewel to him ; the arrival of Shri Rama at the seashore and the bridging of the sea by Nala and Nila ; the siege of Lanka ; the arrival of Ravana's brother Vibishana to take refuge with Shri Rama and the disclosure by him of the design to destroy Ravana ; the slaying of Kumbhakarna and Meghanada ; the destruction of Ravana ; the reunion with Sita ; the crowning of Vibishana, King of Lanka ; the offer of the aerial chariot Pushpaka by Vibishana to Rama ; the return of Shri Rama to Ayodhya ; the reunion with Prince Bharata ; the crowning of Shri Rama as king ; the farewell to the monkey army ; the rejoicings of his subjects at the coronation ; the repudiation of Sita ; these and all the other deeds of Rama on earth have been described in the sacred poem written by the blessed Valmiki himself.

CHAPTER 4

Shri Rama's sons chant the poem

WHILE Shri Rama was still King of Ayodhya, the great Sage Valmiki composed this beautiful classic.

The holy rishi composed twenty-four thousand verses and divided them into five hundred chapters and six books. In addition, he composed the epilogue. The work being completed, he reflected thus: " To whom shall I teach this classic ? "

While the sage was reflecting on the matter, the two princes, Kusha and Lava, the offspring of Rama and Sita approached him and touched his feet in reverence. The great sage studied these two virtuous princes of mellifluous speech, who dwelt with him in his hermitage at that time. Knowing them to be wise and full of faith in the teachings of the Vedas, the great sage, who had expounded the meaning of the scriptures in his verses, taught the classic to them.

The great Valmiki taught them the classic describing the deeds of Rama and Sita and all that relates to the incidents leading to the slaying of Ravana named "The Slaying of the Grandson of Poulastya ".[1] This historical classic is pleasant to sing and adapted to the three measures of time,[2] it is contained within the seven notes and can be sung to the vina. It expresses the various moods of love, courage, disgust, anger, terror, compassion, wonder, laughter and serenity.

The two princes were skilled musicians, proficient in rhythm and melody and had sweet voices; they were as comely to look at as Gandharvas.[3] Endowed with god-like beauty, the two sweet singers, the reflected images of Shri Rama himself, constantly repeated the holy classic and committed it to memory. The two adorable and charming princes skilfully recited the holy classic, the Ramayana, which extols virtue, before the sages, the learned brahmins and the ascetics, as they had been instructed to do.

[1] Poulastya. One of the seven great sages, born from the mind of Brahma, the Creator.
[2] three measures of time—slow, medium, quick.
[3] Gandharvas—celestial musicians.

On a particular occasion, the two princes, great-souled, fortunate, and equipped with all good qualities, chanted the great epic in Shri Rama's assembly. The listening sages were visibly moved and shed tears of delight. Being overcome with wonder, they cried " Excellent! Excellent ", and praising the two singers, the virtue-loving sages experienced great joy. Showering praises on the brothers, they cried, " How melodiously you sing! How exquisite is the divine poem, the story of Rama! "

Being pleased with the sweet singers, one sage presented them with loshtas, another with delicious fruits, a third with robes of bark and another with antelope skins; some gave sacrificial thread, some vessels for collecting alms, others gave loin cloths, kusha grass, garments of yellow cloth, scarves and thread for binding the hair, sacrificial vessels, rosaries and axes. Others bestowed their blessings upon them, saying " May you live long " and all acclaimed the author of the marvellous poem.

They said: " This metre will be the foundation of the verse of future poets; it is composed according to specific rules; the two princes have sung this wonderful poem with great art; it will promote wisdom in those who listen to it and grant them longevity and health; it is truly able to charm the heart."

While the sages were thus praising the two princes, Shri Ramachandra, passing that way, took them to his royal palace. Occupying his golden throne, Shri Rama, the destroyer of his foes, offered hospitality and reverence to the two worthy princes. In the assembly, surrounded by his ministers and brothers, Shri Rama looked approvingly on those handsome and learned youths, and addressed the Princes Lakshmana, Shatrughna and Bharata saying: " Hear the historical poem, which these two celestial and brilliant minstrels sing, this poem which portrays incidents of wonderful meaning."

Then Shri Rama commanded the two musicians to sing and the princes tuned their vinas and chanted the poem they had learned, sweetly and clearly. The whole assembly listened to the music which was wholly gratifying to the mind and heart.

Shri Rama said: " I admire the music and the verse sung by these two minstrels who appear to be endowed with royal attributes."

In this way, praised and encouraged by Shri Ramachandra, the two brothers demonstrating their skill in music, sang on. Listening to them in the royal assembly, Shri Ramachandra was charmed.

CHAPTER 5

King Dasaratha's kingdom and capital

THE earth consisting of seven islands has been under one ruler since the time of those kings descended from Manu,[1] who were ever victorious.

Among those mighty monarchs was Sagara followed by his sixty thousand sons who hollowed out the ocean. This classic Ramayana contains the history of the House of Sagara, founded by Ikshwaku. This Rama-Katha[2] will be recited from beginning to end—let all listen to it with faith.

On the banks of the river Sarayu, there was a great and prosperous country named Koshala, inhabited by contented people. In it was the city of Ayodhya, famous in the three worlds, founded by the renowned Manu, a lord among men. The city's thoroughfares extended for sixty miles; its beauty was enhanced by streets admirably planned, the principal highways being sprinkled with water and strewn with flowers.

King Dasaratha protected the city as Maghavan[3] protects Amaravati.[4] He dwelt there in splendour, as Indra in heaven. The city had beautiful and massive gates and charming markets; its fortifications were planned by skilful engineers and artificers. There were bards, ballad singers and public musicians in the city; the inhabitants were wealthy and had spacious houses with high arched porticos, decorated with flags and banners. It was filled with extensive buildings and beautiful gardens,

[1] Manu from the root "man", "to think". The progenitor of mankind, created by Brahma.
[2] Rama-katha. The recitation of Ramayana.
[3] Maghavan. A title of the Lord Indra, King of the Celestials.
[4] Amaravati. Lord Indra's capital.

and surrounded by mango groves, tall trees enhancing the outskirts of the city, giving it the appearance of a beautiful girl wearing a girdle of greenery. The city was enclosed by strong fortifications and a deep moat which no enemy, by any expedient whatsoever, could penetrate. Countless elephants, horses, cattle, camels and mules were to be seen in the city. Innumerable ambassadors and merchants dwelt there and people from many lands traded peacefully within its walls.

Ayodhya, like Indra's Amaravati, was resplendent with gilded palaces, the walls of which were set with precious stones, the domes resembling mountain peaks. Gem-encrusted, sky-kissing buildings could be seen throughout the royal capital. Dwelling houses, tall and fair, stood in well-placed sites and resounded with delightful music. There were lovely dwellings occupied by men of noble birth, resembling the aerial chariots that carry those of pure life and spiritual perfection to heaven.

The warriors living in that city were of those who do not slay a fleeing foe, they were skilled archers, able to pierce a target by sound alone. Many had slain tigers, lions and wolves wandering near their homes, either in single combat or with different kinds of weapons. This great city which harboured thousands of chieftains was built[1] by King Dasaratha.

In Ayodhya lived countless learned men engaged in the observance of rituals, there were also artists and craftsmen, men deeply read in the Veda and those endowed with every virtue, full of truth and wisdom, as well as thousands of seers and sages versed in the mystical science of Yoga.

CHAPTER 6

The city of Ayodhya

THERE dwelt in that city, King Dasaratha, a follower of the tradition of the illustrious Emperor Manu. The king was learned in the interpretation of the Vedas, his chief wealth was

[1] It is implied that Manu founded the original city on this site, but several cities built by other monarchs succeeded it.

pre-eminence in truth and virtue; he was one who never broke his word, who was ever prudent, majestic and beloved of his subjects, a great charioteer, a worthy descendant of the dynasty of Ikshwaku, an observer of many sacrifices, one who ever delighted in the practice of righteousness; in full authority over his people, equal to a great sage; a royal seer, renowned in the three worlds, triumphing over his enemies, a friend to all; having perfect control of his senses and appetites; in prosperity equal to Indra; in wealth equal to Kuvera.

That truth-loving monarch, striving to acquire perfection in virtue, worldly prosperity and happiness, ruled the city as the celestial monarch Indra rules Amaravati.

The people in that city were happy, virtuous, learned, experienced, each satisfied with his state, practising his own calling, without avarice and of truthful speech. None was indigent or dwelt in a mean habitation; all lived happily with their families, possessing wealth, grain, cattle and horses. In that city of Ayodhya, none was a miser or a swindler, none was mean-spirited, proud, rash, worthless or an atheist. Men and women were of righteous conduct, fully self-controlled, and in their pure and chaste behaviour they equalled the great sages. None lacked earrings, coronets and necklaces. They bathed daily and rubbed their bodies with oil, using attar of roses and sandal paste. None ate impure food, none allowed his neighbour to suffer hunger. All possessed ornaments and gold, and there was none who had not learnt to subdue his mind. No one in the city neglected to offer butter and fragrant objects in the sacrificial fire. No one was mean, impious or failed to discharge his duties; there were no thieves and none were born of mixed castes.

The brahmins were devoted to their respective duties, firm in self-control and authorized to accept gifts. None denied the existence of God, none uttered falsehood or were enamoured of worldly pleasure and none was guilty of slander. No brahmin was unversed in the six systems of philosophy nor did any neglect to fast at the full moon, or on other appointed days; there were none who suffered from mental or physical infirmities and none were unhappy in that city.

Among the inhabitants, there were no revolutionaries and none who were not loyal to king and state. Those who dwelt

there, worshipped the gods and the uninvited guest; they were both magnanimous and charitable.

All attained a ripe age as virtuous and truth-loving people; their homes were filled with children, grandchildren and virtuous women. The warriors were subject to the learned brahmins and the merchants to the warrior caste; in accordance with their caste the people served the brahmins, the warriors and the merchants.

In the administration of the empire, the Emperor Dasaratha followed the example of the first ruler Manu who was supreme in wisdom and a god among men.

Ayodhya abounded in warriors, undefeated in battle, fearless and skilful in the use of arms, resembling lions guarding their mountain caves.

There were horses in the city from Kamroja, Vanaya, Nudi and Vahli, and elephants from the regions of Vindhu and Himavat.

The city of Ayodhya was full of courageous and noble men belonging to the races of Bhadra, Mulla and Mriga, inhabitants of the regions of Binchyachala and the Himalayan ranges.

The city possessed mighty elephants like great hills. That capital was truly worthy of the name 'Ayodhya,' which means " The city none can challenge in warfare ".

Dwelling there, the Emperor Dasaratha, ruling the kingdom, resembled the moon in the midst of countless stars. That great king, equal to Indra himself, reigned over the city, guarded by fortifications and ramparts, a city which contained innumerable dwellings of many kinds and thousands of prosperous inhabitants.

CHAPTER 7

The administration of the kingdom

EVER devoted to the welfare of King Dasaratha, the ministers of the House of Ikshwaku were possessed of all the virtues; their counsels were based on truth and they understood the import of the royal commands immediately.

Eight of the king's counsellors were famed; untiringly employed in the affairs of state, they were honest and devoted to the cultivation of virtue. Their names were Dhristi, Jayanta, Vijaja, Siddhartha, Atyartha-Sadaka, Ashoka, Mantra-pala and Sumantra.

The great and holy sages, Vasishtha and Vamadeva assisted the king in his observance of spiritual duties and also acted as his advisers.

All the ministers were virtuous, scorning to do wrong, benevolent, versed in the moral law, of wide experience, disinterested, magnanimous, acquainted with the spirit of the scriptures, forbearing, patient, obedient to the king, true to their word, cheerful, free from avarice and well acquainted with the affairs of their fellow subjects and with those of the subjects of other monarchs. They were efficient, firm in friendship, and even passed judgment on their own sons if they broke the law.

These counsellors were expert in the science of economics and warfare, and never inflicted unmerited punishment on an enemy. They were brave and unambitious. Conversant with every branch of political life, they protected all those who lived in the state. Adding to the royal treasury without burdening the learned and the warriors, they inflicted penalties on wrongdoers with due regard to their capacity for bearing it. These ministers were pure of heart and of chaste conduct. None consorted with his neighbour's wife, none were wicked and all lived together peaceably. Cultivating every good quality and practising the various arts, they were renowned for their courage, their fair name was published abroad and their lives were guided by reason. Skilled in the laws of the country and blessed with wealth, they issued wise edicts and exercised their minds in philosophical debate.

Acquainted with the moral code, they conversed affectionately with each other; such were King Dasaratha's ministers who, informed by their agents of the needs of the people, satisfied them and governed with prudence.

In the administration of his kingdom, the king never permitted unrighteousness to cause dissension, and became known throughout the world as an ocean of truth. That lion among men

King Dasaratha, reigning over the earth, had none superior or equal to himself. Honoured by his feudal lords, surrounded by friends, King Dasaratha, like Indra, reigned in majesty.

Benevolent, powerful, accomplished and gracious, King Dasaratha protected Ayodhya and shone in splendour like the sun illumining the world.

CHAPTER 8

The king desires to perform a sacrifice for the birth of a son

KING DASARATHA, that glorious and righteous king, though performing great austerities, was without an heir to the throne. Then the wise and great-souled monarch said to himself: "I will perform the horse-sacrifice (Aswa-medha)[1] in order to have a son."

Having thus decided, the supremely sagacious sovereign convened a meeting of his counsellors and addressing his chief minister, Sumantra, commanded him as follows: "Send speedily for the spiritual preceptors and priests." Quick to act, Sumantra at once summoned those highly learned preceptors and brought thither Suyagna, Vamadeva, Javali, Kasyapa and Vasishtha together with other eminent priests and brahmins.

Having offered salutations to these holy men, King Dasaratha, speaking in gracious accents, uttered words full of truth and purpose: He said, "O Sages, I have practised virtue and yet I have not had the good fortune to be blessed with a son; it is therefore my intention to perform the horse-sacrifice. I *wish to act according to the injunction of the scriptures; you, O Holy Men*, advise me after due deliberation as to how I can be successful in the proposed undertaking".

[1] Aswa-Medha. A sacrifice, which in Vedic times was performed by kings. A horse, being consecrated by certain ceremonies, was let loose and allowed to wander at will followed by warriors; the ruler of any country the animal entered was bound to fight or submit; finally the horse was sacrificed with special rites.

The learned brahmins, led by Shri Vasishtha, praised the king's intention and said: " Thou hast decided on the proper course, O King." Highly pleased, they commanded those things requisite for the sacrifice to be assembled and the horse loosed. They said, " O King, let a place of sacrifice be chosen on the north bank of the river Sarayu. O King, this holy resolve formed by thee, for the sake of an heir, will assuredly bring the fulfilment of thy desire ".

Hearing the words of the brahmins, the monarch rejoiced and commanded his ministers to bring the sacrificial appointments and release the horse under the protection of the warriors;[1] they were also directed to erect a sacrificial pavilion on the bank of the river Sarayu. He further decreed the adoption of those measures which would diminish the possibility of hindrance to the sacrifice, for even for kings, the horse-sacrifice was not easily performed.

The king said: " Let it be remembered that during the observance of the sacrifice, no suffering must be inflicted on any, lest some perverse and crafty brahmin should cause obstruction in the proceedings. By carrying through the ritual without regard for scriptural injunctions, it comes to nought; therefore, bring the sacrifice to a successful conclusion. I depend on you, and expect you to carry the sacrifice through to a successful issue."

The counsellors replied, saying, " O King, be it so ".

Blessing the monarch, the learned brahmins retired, and the king addressed his ministers saying: " Prepare the sacrifice as the officiating priests have instructed you and accept responsibility for its final success."

Then the illustrious sovereign left the court and entered his private apartments where the queens dwelt, who loved the king from the depths of their hearts.

King Dasaratha addressed them, saying: " I intend to observe a sacrifice for the sake of obtaining a son, do you all follow the prescribed discipline." The queens rejoiced to hear these words from the lips of the king and their lotus-like faces brightened like flowers on the departure of the cold season.

[1] See note on page 22.

CHAPTER 9

Sumantra relates a tradition that a son will be born through the help of the Sage Rishyasringa

SUMANTRA, having heard of the preparations for the sacrifice, obtained a private audience with his sovereign and said: " I have heard of a tradition, formerly related to me by the august brahmins. O King, in ancient days, the blessed Sanatkumara predicted to the holy sages around him that a son would be born to thee.

It was prophesied that a son of Kasyapa, named Vibhandaka would have a son called Rishyasringa and that he should dwell in the forest alone with his saintly father, unknown to any other man or woman.

This sage would keep the twofold vow of brahmacharya enjoined by the sages. In this way he would pass a long time worshipping God through the fire-sacrifice and the service of his sire.

In the country named Anga, a famous king named Lomapada, would oppress the people by his evil way of life and thus cause a drought. On account of this, the king would suffer great affliction and summoning the brahmins would say to them: " O Wise Men, acquainted as you are with the customs of the world and also the divine laws, tell me what ritual of purification and repentance I can adopt to expiate my evil deeds, which have brought about this drought."

Then the brahmins, learned in the Veda, would answer the king thus: " O King, exert thyself by every means to bring the son of the Sage Vibhandaka hither. Having with due reverence conveyed him hither, do thou confer thy daughter Shanta on him in marriage."

The king having listened to their words and reflected on how he should bring that excellent sage to the court, would then request his ministers and priests to approach the sage, but they would declare their unwillingness to undertake the mission, being afraid of the rishi's power.

In order to avoid the monarch's displeasure, however, after

deliberating on the method by which the sage could be brought to the court, they would make the following proposal: " By the courtesans can the sage be persuaded to come to the king's court, the rains will then follow and the drought will be at an end. Then will the king join his daughter in marriage to the sage. By pouring oblations into the sacrificial fire the illustrious sage, Rishyasringa, will, by his grace, obtain the desired son for King Dasaratha."

" Thus spoke the illustrious Sanatkumara, in the midst of the sages, and I have now recounted it to thee."

King Dasaratha was delighted to hear these words, and requested the minister to describe further how King Lomapada brought the sage to his court.

CHAPTER 10

He describes how Rishyasringa was brought to King Lomapada's court

THUS requested, Sumantra began to narrate the story in detail and said: " O Great King, hear how the ministers brought the Sage Rishyasringa to the court.

" The ministers addressed King Lomapada saying: ' We have a plan whereby the young sage may be conveyed hither successfully. He resides in the forest, devoted to holy study, spiritual practices and asceticism, and is wholly unacquainted with the pursuit of pleasure.

" ' By the means of those things gratifying to the senses, we shall most certainly be able to bring the sage to the court. Let beautifully-attired and lovely courtesans go there and by their acts, charm and bring him hither '."

The king approved the plan and commanded his ministers to carry it out.

The courtesans then entered the forest and took up their abode near the hermitage, seeking a meeting with the young sage. Protected by his father, the youthful ascetic seldom

passed the boundaries of the hermitage, nor had he seen any man or woman beyond its precincts.

One day, impelled by destiny, the youth went forth from the hermitage and beheld the graceful and beautiful women, attired in many-coloured robes of exquisite design, singing sweetly. They approached the son of Rishi Vibhandaka and addressed him, saying : " Who art thou ? Whose son art thou ? What is thy name ? Why dost thou dwell in the dark forest ? "

Never having beheld women of beauty and charm before, Rishyasringa was captivated and answered them, saying : " My father is the great Sage Vibhandaka of the family of Kasyapa and I am his son, my name is Rishyasringa. O Beautiful Beings of charming mien, my hermitage is near at hand, please come thither and allow me to offer you hospitality there."

The courtesans accepted the invitation and accompanied the sage who received them in the traditional manner, placing before them water to wash their feet and delicious roots and fruits.

Fearing the father's return and anxious to depart with all haste, the courtesans plied the young sage with tasty confections which they had brought with them, saying : " Be pleased to accept these dainties which we have brought for thee to enjoy on this occasion." They then caressed the youth, feeding him with sweets and other delicacies.

The resplendent sage partook of the offerings, thinking them to be fruits, never having tasted any other food.

The courtesans, fearing the father's return, pretended to be fasting and left the hermitage. At their departure, the youthful sage felt dejected and restless.

The following day, the courtesans, charmingly attired, again went to the hermitage and smiled on perceiving the young sage appear so disconsolate. They then approached him and said : " O Handsome Youth, to-day please grace our hermitage with thy presence. O Auspicious One, we can entertain thee better there than here."

The young sage agreed to accompany them and went with them to their abode. As the sage entered the city, Indra showered rain on the domain of King Lomapada and the people rejoiced.

When the rain began to fall, King Lomapada, realising that the holy sage had entered the city, went out to meet him. Offering him humble and loving salutations, he presented him with the traditional gifts (arghya)[1] of water and food, and entreated him to grant the boon that his father Vibhandaka should not visit his displeasure on him.

The king then took the youth to the inner apartments and united him in marriage to his daughter Shanta.

Deeply revered by the king, Rishyasringa lived happily in the capital with his bride, the Princess Shanta.

CHAPTER II

King Dasaratha goes to King Lomapada, by whose permission Rishyasringa comes to Ayodhya

SUMANTRA said : " O Great King, hearken further to the words of the great Sage Sanatkumara :—

" ' In the House of Ikshwaku, there will be a highly righteous and truth-loving king named Dasaratha who will form an alliance with King Lomapada of Anga.

" ' King Dasaratha will approach his friend Lomapada and beg the assistance of Rishyasringa, the husband of the Princess Shanta, in the performance of the sacrifice he desires to observe, that he may be blessed with a son. After mature consideration, King Lomapada will permit Shanta's lord, Rishyasringa to accompany King Dasaratha. Highly gratified, King Dasaratha will return to his capital with Rishyasringa and will ask the sage to officiate at the sacrifice he is about to perform in order to obtain sons and also a future abode in the celestial regions.

" 'As a result of the sacrifice, King Dasaratha will have four sons, each of limitless valour. These sons will be renowned throughout the world and will increase the glory of their dynasty.'

[1] Arghya. A ceremonial offering of water, milk and kusha grass, rice, durva, sandalwood, flowers, etc.

"This story was narrated by the Sage Sanatkumara in the first quarter of Satya-Yuga.[1] O Great King! Thou shouldst approach Rishyasringa with a worthy chariot and retinue, and bring him with ceremony to thy capital."

Having heard the good counsel of his minister Sumantra, the King commanded him to inform his Guru Vasishtha of this matter, and the holy Vasishtha acquiesced in the plan.

Then the king, with firm resolve, attended by his queens, counsellors and priests, prepared to set forth for the city where Rishyasringa dwelt. Passing through various forests and traversing many rivers, the king arrived at Lomapada's capital. There he beheld the resplendent sage, in lustre like a glowing fire, seated near King Lomapada.

Inspired by friendship, the great monarch Lomapada offered respectful salutations to King Dasaratha and informed Rishyasringa of his alliance with this king, whereupon the sage expressed his approval in words of praise.

Having enjoyed the hospitality of King Lomapada for seven days, King Dasaratha addressed him thus: "O King, I desire to enter upon an important undertaking, be gracious enough to allow thy daughter Shanta and her lord to return to my capital to assist me."

Hearing these words, King Lomapada replied: "Be it so," and turning to the sage said: "Be pleased to go with thy wife to the capital of King Dasaratha."

The youthful sage assented to the command of King Lomapada, and he, in company with his spouse, departed with King Dasaratha.

Having taken leave of his friend, King Dasaratha despatched speedy messengers to go before him to instruct his ministers to prepare for their arrival.

The people of Ayodhya carried out all as they had been commanded and overjoyed at the monarch's return, fulfilled the instructions of his messengers. The citizens were delighted to behold the young sage entering the city and being honoured by the king, as Indra in heaven pays tribute to Kasyapa.

Having introduced the sage and his consort to the inner

[1] Satya-Yuga—the Golden Age. There are four yugas in the world cycle—Satya or Krita, Treta, Dwapara and Kali, the golden, silver, copper, and iron age.

apartments, the king offered him the traditional welcome as enjoined in the scriptures.

The royal ladies also welcomed the wide-eyed Shanta with her lord to the private apartments, and expressed their pleasure and delight.

Honoured and worshipped by the queens, no less than by King Dasaratha himself, the Princess Shanta and her husband, the sage, dwelt in the palace as Brihaspati[1] resides in the city of Mahendra.

CHAPTER 12

Rishyasringa agrees to assist in the sacrifice

TIME passed and the spring came again while the holy sage was at the court of King Dasaratha. On a propitious day, the king decided to enter upon the sacrifice.

He approached Rishyasringa and, bowing low, offered salutations to him, inviting that god-like sage to assist in the sacrifice he was observing, to preserve the dynasty. The sage agreed and requested the king to provide the necessary material for the sacrifice and to let loose the horse.

The sovereign commanded his minister Sumantra to summon with all speed the priests acquainted with the philosophy of the Veda, and sent invitations to the sages Vamadeva, Javali, Kasyapa, the high priest Vasishtha and other exalted and learned brahmins.

Sumantra, setting out in haste, approached the sages courteously and brought them to the king. The virtuous monarch, after paying respectful homage to them, addressed them humbly, speaking words full of candour and integrity.

He said : " O Sages, despite my ardent desire to have an heir, I am without one. I have, therefore, decided to perform the horse sacrifice to that end. I desire the sacrifice to be observed according to the scriptural laws and through the grace of the Sage Rishyasringa, I hope to attain my purpose."

[1] Brihaspati. The Guru of the gods, also the regent of the planet Jupiter.

The sages advised the king to gather together the sacrificial articles and to release the horse.

They said: "Righteous is thy desire to be blessed with a son; O King, thou shalt surely obtain four illustrious sons of limitless valour."

The brahmins' words convinced the king that heirs would be granted to him and he communicated his satisfaction to his ministers. He said: "O Counsellors, bring together four high priests and set the horse at liberty under the protection of four hundred warriors. Let a sacrificial pavilion be set up on the bank of the river Sarayu, and let appropriate protective rites be observed lest obstructions arise."

The king then ordained that during the period of sacrifice neither priests nor other persons should be subject to any suffering whatsoever. He said: "In such rites, others have been impeded by sub-human beings, which has resulted in the annulment of the sacrifice. You should, therefore, employ every means to bring the sacrifice to a successful conclusion."

Hearing the words of the king, the ministers—highly gratified—began to act according to his instructions. Then the brahmins assured the king that the sacrifice would be accomplished without hindrance and offering him obeisance, returned to their homes.

The brahmins having departed, the king bade farewell to his ministers and entered his private apartments.

CHAPTER 13

The Sacrifice is commenced

THE following year, spring having returned once more, the king, desiring to complete the sacrifice for the sake of an heir, paid homage to Shri Vasishtha, offering him humble salutations according to the prescribed ordinance, and addressed that great brahmin with submission, saying:—

" O Great Sage, be pleased to complete the holy ceremony according to the sacred tradition. Let it be so undertaken that no interference may take place. Thou art compassionate and thy heart is inclined towards me. Thou art also my Guru, the burden of the sacrifice must be borne by thee."

The most excellent sage replied, " Be it so. I will do as thou desirest."

Hereafter, Shri Vasishtha summoned those brahmins, able to perform the holy rituals and also artificers, architects, writers, actors and dancers.

Addressing the learned priests, he said: "At the king's command, inaugurate the great sacrifice. Cause bricks in thousands to be brought hither with all speed and erect many kinds of dwellings, well arranged, furnished with food and every comfort to accommodate royal and other guests. Prepare hundreds of beautiful houses on suitable sites, together with provisions and all things needed by brahmins; erect also large buildings for the people of other lands, and store food and articles of comfort where it is best to do so. Fine and well-equipped houses should be built for villagers. Ensure that hospitality in the form of food and refreshment be given with courtesy and kindness. Those attending the sacrifice should be entertained with respect and consideration, being received in a becoming manner, according to their caste. Let no affront be offered to any through greed, anger or lust. Let craftsmen and servants be suitably regarded, so that their hearts be set on their task and let no one act disruptively. Treat all in a spirit of goodwill and courtesy, so that the work may be successfully accomplished."

The people listened to the holy sage and answered, " We will act according to thy instructions, O Sage, nothing shall be omitted."

Shri Vasishtha then summoned the chief minister Sumantra and said: " Send out invitations to the sacrifice to all the righteous kings of the earth and also the brahmins, kshatriyas, vaishyas and shudras of every country, but go first to the great Sovereign of Mithila, the heroic Janaka, eminent in truth, the greatest of warriors and a knower of the Veda, since he is an ancient ally of King Dasaratha. Thereafter, bring the ever-

truthful King of Kashi, of exemplary conduct, equal to a god; and then the aged and virtuous King of Kaikeya, our sovereign's father-in-law, and invite his son also. Call the fortunate King Lomapada of Anga, the intimate friend of the King, and bring hither, with respect, Koshala, the King of Magadha.

"Thereafter, send messengers to the kings of the eastern countries of Sindhu, Souriva, and Sourashtra, and the monarchs of the south, with other great kings of the earth; let them come with their brothers, relations, retainers and servants."

Having heard the words of Shri Vasishtha, Sumantra carried out the instructions given by him, dispatching invitations by special messengers to the monarchs of many lands, himself going forth to escort some of the great kings.

Sumantra having departed, all the workers employed in the sacrifice informed the holy sage of their progress, and he advised them further saying: "Let nothing be presented to any without due respect, even in jest; gifts given with contempt lead to the destruction of the giver."

A few days later, the kings from afar arrived at the sacrificial pavilion bearing gifts of gems.

Then Shri Vasishtha, being pleased, said: "O King, at thy command, all the kings have come and been received by me with due hospitality. The preparations for the sacrifice are now completed, be pleased to enter the sacrificial pavilion and inspect the articles needed for the ceremony. See how well thy servants have furnished everything requisite and have gratified thy every wish."

On the recommendation of the Sage Vasishtha and Rishyasringa, King Dasaratha went to the sacrificial ground at an auspicious time, when a propitious star was in the ascendant. Then the learned brahmins and Shri Vasishtha elected Rishyasringa as chief priest.

The sacrifice began in accordance with the ancient ordinance and the king, with his queens, engaged in the preliminary initiations.

CHAPTER 14

The Ceremonies are performed with the appropriate rites

HAVING ranged far and wide during a year, the horse returned and on the bank of the river Sarayu the sacrifice of King Dasaratha continued. The chief priests, under Rishyasringa, assisted the king in the observance of the rituals. Brahmins learned in the ancient science, also officiated and assisted the king according to the instructions laid down in the Kalpa Sutra.

The two special portions of the sacrifice *Pravargya* and *Upasada* were duly observed; then the brahmins worshipped the gods with joy. The illustrious sage performed certain rituals and offered Indra the part of the sacrifice due to him. Thereafter all partook of the soma-juice which destroys every sin.

The high-souled king duly undertook the third portion of the ceremony with the assistance of the holy brahmins. In the sacrifice, no oblation was omitted and none wrongly offered in the sacred fire. All that was done was correctly carried out under the supervision of the sages.

During the period of sacrifice, no brahmin experienced hunger or thirst. Countless priests were present and each was attended by hundreds of disciples. Workers, servants and other classes were feasted like the brahmins, and monks and ascetics were provided for abundantly.

The aged, the children, and the women were served with all they cared to eat, and those who attended on them were willing and pleasant.

By the king's command, apparel, money and other gifts were freely distributed with immeasurable generosity. Mountains of cooked and uncooked foods were to be seen and each could have what he required, to suit his needs. Men and women from many lands were daily entertained with food and drink. From every side, the king heard the exclamations "How delicious is the food, we are well content".

Servants and retainers gorgeously clad and wearing golden earrings, attended on the brahmins, while others adorned with jewels served other castes.

In the interval between the two parts of the sacrifice, eloquent and learned pundits debated metaphysical problems and vied with each other in the display of wisdom and acumen.

Day by day, the sacrificial ceremonies were carried out by learned and holy priests. There were none assisting at the holy ritual who were illiterate or unacquainted with the Vedas.

Each attendant of the king was inspired by exalted principles and all were highly eloquent and deeply versed in the scriptures.

Eighteen pillars of wood were set up in the place of sacrifice, each made of a different kind of timber. Priests, skilled in the art of sacrificial rites, overlaid them with gold. Each of the eighteen columns was twenty-one feet in height, polished and of octangular shape and all were firmly fixed in the earth and covered with embroidered cloths. In addition, they were adorned with sandalwood and flowers and looked as beautiful as the constellation of the seven sages,[1] in the sky. Sacrificial pits were constructed by master masons and the fire kindled by brahmins.

The sacrificial pit prepared for King Dasaratha was formed like a great eagle in gold, its wings set with gems.

The beasts to be sacrificed to each particular deity were bound according to scriptural injunction. There were birds, snakes and horses, and according to tradition, the chief priest bound the aquatic animals, such as turtles, in the sacrificial pavilion. Three hundred beasts and the horse which had roamed over the earth were assembled.

Queen Kaushalya joyfully paid reverence to the horse before making the sacrifice with three strokes of the sword. Prompted by righteous desire, Queen Kaushalya passed the night watching over the dead body of the horse, then the priests caused the king's serving women and the courtesans to approach it.

The twice-born of subdued senses cooked the fat of the horse on the fire in the manner prescribed by the shastra. King Dasaratha inhaling the odour emitted by the fat, acknowledged and expiated his sins. Sixteen assistant priests made offerings of parts of the horse into the fire, in spoons fashioned of cane, plaksha wood being used in other sacrifices. At the horse

[1] The Plough, each star of which is said to be presided over by one of the immortal sages.

sacrifice, three days of special rituals are observed: during the first day the *Agnistona* is performed; during the second day, the *Uktha* rite, during the third day the *Atiratra* rite. The great sacrificial acts named *Jyotishtoma*, *Agnishtona*, *Atiratas*, *Abhijit*, *Vishnajit* and *Aptoryama* are also observed.

King Dasaratha, the promoter of his dynasty, on the conclusion of the sacrifice, gave away four parts of his kingdom, as dakshina[1] to the four priests. The king distributed alms following the great example of Swayambhumanu of old. The sacrifice being concluded, that great monarch gave large portions of the earth in charity, to the officiating priests, and finally that magnanimous sovereign bestowed the whole kingdom on the assisting priests.

Then the holy brahmins addressed that sinless monarch, saying: "O Lord of Men, we are not able to protect, defend and administer this vast empire, for we have dedicated ourselves to holy study. Therefore, O Great King, we render back these lands to thee, grant us in return some lesser gift, be it gems, gold or coins to help us in our hermitages."

Thus addressed by the learned brahmins, the king bestowed on them a hundred million pieces of gold, and four hundred million silver coins. Then the assisting priests placed all the king's gifts before the holy sages, Vasishtha and Rishyasringa and begged them to distribute them.

Each one received his just share and the priests were highly pleased and well satisfied. The king gave away gold coins to those who had come to witness the sacrifice and ten million gold coins were bestowed on other brahmins present at that time. A needy mendicant begged for the diamond studded bracelet worn by the king himself and it was freely bestowed on him.

Beholding the brahmins fully satisfied, King Dasaratha with great gladness made obeisance to them again and again.

The twice-born then bestowed their blessings on the king who was exceedingly liberal and valorous and who saluted them by prostrating himself on the earth.

Thus ended the great sacrifice, the means of destroying sin and attaining heaven and scarcely to be accomplished by other monarchs.

[1] Dakshina. Gifts of charity given at the conclusion of a ceremony.

Then the king addressed Rishyasringa and said: "O Thou of great and virtuous resolve, tell me what further must be done by me to be blessed with an heir?"

The Sage Rishyasringa replied: "O King, thou shalt be blessed with four sons, who will perpetuate the royal line."

CHAPTER 15

To destroy Ravana, Shri Vishnu resolves to incarnate

THE wise Rishyasringa, versed in the Scriptures, meditated for a while and then spoke to King Dasaratha saying:—

"O King, I will perform the sacrifice Puttatresti,[1] spoken of in the Atharva Veda, which will assist thee in thy endeavour to obtain a son."

Then the sage inaugurated the sacrifice and poured oblations into the sacred fire accompanied by the chant of Vedic mantras.

The celestial beings, gandharvas, siddhas[2] and sages assembled to obtain their portion of the sacrifice. After the sacrifice, they all approached Shri Brahma, the Lord of mankind and with joined palms addressed him:—

They said: "O Blessed Lord, having been favoured by thee, the Asura Ravana, perpetually troubles us who are helpless, since thou hast granted great boons to him and we are forced to bear his fearful oppression.

"This Lord of Rakshasas has persecuted the three worlds and having overthrown the guardians of the earth, he has even humbled Indra himself. Provoking the sages, contemplatives, brahmins and the gods, he even controls the sun's rays and the wind's power, even the ocean in his presence is still. At his approach, O Blessed Lord, we are terrified. O Giver of Boons, be pleased to bring about his destruction."

Hearing these words, Brahma reflected for a while and

[1] Puttatresti. The sacrifice to extend the race by having sons.
[2] Siddhas. Semi-divine beings that dwell in the region between the earth and the sun.

answered : " I have devised a plan for slaying this wicked tyrant. It was granted to Ravana that no gandharva, yaksha or deva should be able to slay him, but thinking man to be of no account, he did not ask to be made invulnerable in regard to him; therefore, none but man can destroy him."

These words, uttered by Shri Brahma filled the celestial and other beings with joy.

At this time the immortal Vishnu, with conch, disc and mace, the Overlord of the whole world, clad in a yellow robe, appeared at that place. Adored by the gods, he drew near and took his seat by Shri Brahma, then all the gods addressed him saying :—

" O Madhusudana[1], for the good of all beings, we entreat Thee, to be born as heir to the supremely righteous, charitable and illustrious Sage Dasaratha. Appear, O Lord, in the form of four sons to the three consorts of that great king. Descending into a human body, do thou slay Ravana, the scourge of the universe, whom we are unable to destroy. That ignorant Ravana, by his power, afflicts the devas, siddhas and sages. O Lord, that wicked asura, sporting in the garden of Indra, has slain countless nymphs and gandharvas. In company with the sages, we approach Thee so that we may be released from this oppression. We take refuge in Thee, Thou art our only asylum! O Lord, we beseech Thee to take birth as man in order to destroy the enemy of men and gods."

Thus did the gods appeal to Shri Vishnu and He, adored by the world, answered them who had taken refuge in Him :—

" O Devas, fear no more, peace be with you. For your sake, I will destroy Ravana, together with his sons, grandsons, counsellors, friends and relatives. Having slain that cruel and wicked asura, the cause of fear to the divine sages, I will rule in the world of mortals for eleven thousand years."

Thus did Shri Vishnu grant a boon to the gods, and then reflected as to where on the earth he should take birth as man.

Then the lotus-eyed Lord resolved to become incarnate as the four sons of King Dasaratha.

The celestial sages, the heavenly musicians and the nymphs

[1] Madhusudana. Slayer of Madhu. (A demon.)

praised the Lord saying: " O Universal Sovereign, destroy the wicked asura, who is arrogant, powerful and vain, the enemy of Indra and the scourge of the ascetics and pious men, one who strikes terror into every heart, causing universal lamentation.

" Destroy, O Lord, this mighty being, together with his army, generals, relatives, friends and followers, remove the cause of the world's woe and then return to thy perfect abode."

CHAPTER 16

He decides to incarnate as the four sons of King Dasaratha

THE Omniscient Lord, Shri Narayana,[1] listened to the praise offered by the gods and honouring them, uttered words of pleasing import to them.

He said: " O Devas, by what means may the King of the Asuras be slain, that thorn in the side of holy men? "

The gods with one accord answered the imperishable Lord, crying: " Do Thou become incarnate in the form of man and slay him in open fight. O Conqueror of Thy foes, Ravana has long practised austerities, by means of which he has won the favour of the world-revered Brahma. That deity has granted him a boon, by which he is rendered invulnerable to all but man. Considering man of no account, he does not fear him. The boon bestowed on him by Shri Brahma has made him arrogant and he is bringing destruction to the three worlds and carrying off women by violence. Therefore, O Lord, man alone can bring about his death."

Hearing the words of the gods, Shri Vishnu resolved to choose King Dasaratha as his sire.

At that time, the illustrious King Dasaratha, the slayer of his foes, began to observe the sacrifice in order to obtain an heir. Shri Vishnu, having formed his resolution to appear in human form and concluded his deliberations with Shri Brahma, vanished.

[1] Narayana. A name of Shri Vishnu, " He whose abode is the water ".

Forthwith there issued from King Dasaratha's sacrificial fire to the sound resembling the beating of a drum, a great Being of limitless splendour, of glowing countenance, clad in red and hairy as a lion. Bearing auspicious marks and adorned with beautiful ornaments, his height was equal to the peak of a mountain. Striding boldly like a lion, his form shone as fire. In both hands he carried, as would a beloved spouse, a vessel of gold, with a silver cover, filled with payasa.[1]

This great Being addressed the king saying: " O King, I come from Prajapati.[2] The king bowing down with joined palms, answered: " Thou art welcome, O Lord, what orders hast thou for me ? "

Then the Being replied: "Receive the fruit of thy sacrifice! O Chief of Men, accept this dish of payasa prepared by the gods, it will bring thee sons and increase thy power. Let it be eaten by thy consorts, they will then present thee with the heirs for whose sake thou hast performed the sacrifice."

The king received the food contained in the golden vessel prepared by the gods and reverently raised it to his forehead. Having received the divine repast, he rejoiced as a penniless man on obtaining wealth.

Forthwith that wonderful and resplendent being vanished, having offered the consecrated food to the king.

The tidings of this great event caused the consorts of King Dasaratha extreme delight and they appeared as radiant as the beams of the moon irradiating the autumnal sky.

Entering the private apartments, the king addressed Queen Kaushalya, saying: " Receive this food and partake of it that thou mayest have a son."

Thereafter, the monarch gave half of the dish to Queen Kaushalya and one-third to Queen Sumitra. Then he gave the eighth of the payasa to Queen Kaikeyi and, after reflection, the remainder to Queen Sumitra. In this way, the King divided the dish of payasa among his three queens.

On partaking of the food, the beautiful queens were overjoyed and considered themselves most fortunate.

Having consumed the payasa presented to them by the king,

[1] Payasa. A special preparation of rice in milk.
[2] Prajapati. A name of Brahma, the Creator.

the queens soon became pregnant, their wombs glowing like the fire in the sun.

The illustrious sovereign perceiving that the wombs of his consorts were quickened and that his great desire was about to be fulfilled, was filled with supreme joy, as is Shri Vishnu when worshipped by the gods and perfect beings in the celestial region.

CHAPTER 17

To assist Shri Vishnu, celestial beings incarnate as warriors of the monkey tribe

SHRI VISHNU having become the sons[1] of King Dasaratha, the divine Brahma thus addressed the gods: " The blessed Lord Vishnu, the Ocean of Truth is engaged in a just undertaking for the good of all, you should therefore support Him by becoming incarnate as great beings in the monkey tribe, skilled in the arts of magic, swift as the wind, conversant with the dictates of virtue, wise and equal in might to the Lord, invincible, endowed with celestial bodies and skilful in the science of warfare. Some among you should assume the forms of nymphs, gandharvas and female ascetics who will give birth to heroes in the monkey tribe.

" In the past, when I yawned, the great bear, by the name of Jambavan, issued from my mouth."

The gods thus instructed by the blessed Lord, caused warriors to be born in the monkey tribe from the wombs of countless celestial beings.

Indra created Bali, the Sun created Sugriva; Brihaspati created the wise Tara, Kuvera begat Gandha-madana,[2] Vishwakarma[3] begat the mighty ape Nala, Agni begat Nila, who was as resplendent as fire and in valour surpassed his father.

[1] Sons. The Lord was partially manifested in all the sons of King Dasaratha.
[2] Gandha-madana. A general of the monkey allies of Rama.
[3] Vishwakarma. The architect of the gods.

The Aswini-Kumaras[1] produced Minda and Dvivida; Varuna[2] begat Suchena; Megha,[3] was the father of Sharabha, the mighty; Pavana[4] begat the warrior called Hanuman, whose body was as hard as a diamond and whose speed equalled an eagle's; he excelled all the other warriors in wisdom and power.

There were thousands of warriors born in the monkey tribe ready to destroy Ravana. All the bears, monkeys and chimpanzees resembled the god that had produced them in characteristics, habits and prowess, and many were of outstanding valour. The female chimpanzees and bears gave birth to great beings of divine nature. They produced hundreds and thousands of healthy progeny. These dwellers of the forest were imposing in form and in strength and fearlessness resembled lions and tigers. All were able to cleave rocks and mountains and fight with their nails and teeth. Skilled in every kind of weapon, they could shake great peaks, uproot the stoutest trees and by their velocity even put the sea god to shame. Able to tear up the earth with their feet and cause the ocean to overflow, they could fly in the air and even seize the clouds.

These beings of the monkey tribe wandered in the woods, making captive the elephants, and by their shouts causing the birds in flight to fall to the ground. Thus were born millions of monkeys, able to assume any form, together with hundreds and thousands of monkey chiefs.

These chiefs begot other brave and powerful beings, some of whom dwelt on the mountains while others inhabited the valleys and forests.

The two brothers, Sugriva, the offspring of Surya,[5] and Bali, the son of Indra, became the leaders of all the monkeys. Others lived under the command of group leaders, such as Nala, Nila and Hanuman. They were as strong as eagles and skilled in every sort of warfare.

Wandering about the forest, they slew lions, tigers and

[1] Aswini-kumaras. Gods, sons of the sun, precursors of the dawn, also the patrons of medicine.
[2] Varuna. The Hindu Neptune.
[3] Megha. The Regent of the clouds.
[4] Pavana. Lord of the winds.
[5] Surya—the sun.

poisonous snakes. The powerful long-armed Bali protected the monkeys, bears and chimpanzees by his prowess. These heroes, invincible as mountains and of immense size, born to assist Shri Rama, filled the earth.

CHAPTER 18

King Dasaratha's sons are born and grow to manhood

WHEN the sacrifice of King Dasaratha had been brought to a successful conclusion, the gods, receiving their due portions, returned to their abode.

The king also, having fulfilled the obligations incurred by his initiation, returned to the capital with his queens, servants, army and vehicles.

The royal guests to whom due hospitality had been shown, made obeisance to the Sage Vasishtha and returned to their homes. When they departed, ornaments, apparel and gifts were distributed to their armies who set out for their own cities with joy.

King Dasaratha attended the departure of his guests and then re-entered the capital in a procession preceded by the holy brahmins.

Rishyasringa with his wife Shanta then took leave of the monarch and departed to his own city, King Dasaratha accompanying him for some distance. Then the king, expecting to be blessed with an heir, dwelt happily in Ayodhya.

Six seasons after the completion of the sacrifice, in the twelfth month, on the ninth day of the moon of Chaitramas, the star Punarvasu was in the ascendant, and the planets, the Sun, Mars, Saturn, Jupiter and Venus were exalted, and those signs of the zodiac, such as the Ram, the Fishes, and the Scales in auspicious aspects, the moon and Jupiter being in conjunction at the period called Karka. Then the world-honoured Lord of the World, endowed with divine attributes, Shri Ramachandra was born of the womb of Kaushalya.

The Promoter of the glory of the House of Ikshwaku, the blessed Lord Vishnu was born as a son of Queen Kaushalya. When this child of limitless splendour was born, the queen looked most beautiful, like Aditi of old, favoured by Indra.

The hero of the realm of truth, Bharata, was born of Queen Kaikeyi. Possessed of every grace, he was endowed with a quarter of the glory of Shri Vishnu.

Sumitra gave birth to Lakshmana and Shatrughna, heroes skilful in the wielding of weapons and also partaking of Shri Vishnu's glory.

Bharata was born when the star Pushya was in the ascendant in the Lagna Meena.[1] During the ascendance of the star Shlasa in the Lagna Karka,[2] at the time of sunrise Shatrughna was born.

Each of the sons of the king had special attributes and were endowed with great qualities, they were as resplendent as the Purva,[3] Uttara[4] and Bhadripata[5] stars.

At that time gandharvas played divine melodies, nymphs danced, celestial drums were heard and the gods showered flowers from the sky.

Everywhere in the capital, signs of rejoicing were apparent; the streets were filled with actors and dancers and those who sang or played on various instruments.

The king gave gifts to the bards and ballad singers and conferred wealth and cows on the brahmins.

The four children were named on the twelfth day; the eldest son received the name Ramachandra, and the name given to the son of Queen Kaikeyi was Bharata.

The sons of Queen Sumitra were called Lakshmana and Shatrughna. The ceremony was performed by the holy Sage Vasishtha with great joy. After this, the brahmins of the capital and the country were feasted and presented with gifts and precious gems.

Resembling the deity Shri Brahma, the king showed universal

[1] Lagna Meena—Pisces.
[2] Lagna Karka—Cancer. Lagna is the point where the horizon and the path of the planets meet.
[3] Purva—Star of the East.
[4] Uttara—Northern Star.
[5] Bhadripata—One of the Lunar Asterisms.

benevolence. The princes grew in the knowledge of the Veda, in courage and active goodwill to all. Though each was wise, learned and possessed of every virtue, yet Shri Ramachandra excelled them in truthfulness and energy, and was beloved of all, like the flawless orb of the moon. Expert in mounting the elephant, the horse and the chariot, he was skilful in archery and devoted to the service of his parents.

Shri Lakshmana cherished an exceeding love for his elder brother Shri Ramachandra, the delight of the world, and Shri Rama loved him also as his very self. Shri Ramachandra loved Lakshmana who was endowed with every excellent quality, as his own life, and neither slept nor partook of any nourishment without the other.

When Raghava mounted on horseback, engaged in the chase, Shri Lakshmana followed with bow and arrows to protect him.

Emulating the example of Shri Ramachandra, Bharata loved Shatrughna and was loved by him with equal affection.

The monarch was as pleased and satisfied with his four sons as is Shri Brahma with the four Vedas. Observing the wisdom, prudence and modesty of his children, who were endowed with every great attribute, King Dasaratha derived as great a delight from them as Brahma from the four guardians of the earth.

The princes studied the Veda with perseverance, affectionately attended on the king and acquired proficiency in the use of arms.

One day when the illustrious sovereign was in council with his relatives, ministers, and learned preceptors, deliberating on the marriage of his four sons, the great Sage Vishwamitra appeared in the capital. Seeking an audience with the king, he addressed the doorkeeper, saying: " Inform the king speedily that the son of Gadhi of the race of Kaushika is at the gate." The awe-stricken guard hastened to the royal apartment and conveyed the tidings with due respect to his majesty, who with his Guru Vasishtha went forth to welcome the sage at the gate and bring him into the royal palace.

As Brahma welcomes Indra, so did they greet the muni, and beholding that resplendent and mighty ascetic, the observer of great vows, of cheerful countenance, the king offered him arghya according to the prescribed tradition.

The virtuous Vishwamitra then enquired of the king concerning the welfare of the empire, the prosperity of his people, relatives and friends and also as to the state of the royal treasury. Thereafter, the sage questioned the monarch further, saying: "Are thy vassals obedient to thee? Are thine enemies subdued? Are the Vedic sacrifices duly observed in thy dominion? Are strangers entertained with fitting hospitality?" Then after enquiring as to the well-being of Shri Vasishtha and other sages, Shri Vishwamitra entered the palace.

Here the king once more paid him reverence and with delight addressed him saying: "O August Sage, thy coming has caused me as great a joy as the acquisition of ambrosia or the advent of rain falling on the parched earth. O Sage, thy approach is as grateful to me as the birth of a son to one without an heir or the recovery of his wealth to one who imagined it to be irretrievably lost. O Mighty Sage, I welcome thee with my whole heart, say what commands thou hast for me? When thy glance doth fall upon me, O Sage, I become righteous and acquire merit; to-day my life is rendered fruitful and the purpose of my birth is accomplished since thou hast visited me. O Auspicious One, formerly thou wast a warrior sage, illustrious by virtue of thy sacred practices, but now thou art become a brahmin[1] and art worthy of supreme worship by me. Thine advent has conferred purity and blessing on me, and by thy sacred presence both the kingdom and I have been purged of every offence. Be pleased to tell us of the purpose of thy coming, I desire to manifest my gratitude to thee by rendering thee service. O Kaushika, do not hesitate to speak thy will, I am ready to do anything for thee; thou art to me as a god. O Brahman Seer, by beholding thee, I have acquired the great merits of a pilgrimage."

Hearing the words of King Dasaratha, sweet sounding and in accordance with the scriptural injunctions, the great sage, the repository of all excellent qualities, was highly gratified.

[1] Vishwamitra was originally of the warrior class and won brahminhood by his asceticism. His story follows later.

CHAPTER 19

Vishwamitra's request

HEARING the laudatory and admirable words of that Lion among kings, Dasaratha, the great Sage Vishwamitra answered: " O Great King, who in the world save one of the House of Ikshwaku, instructed by Shri Vasishtha, could give tongue to such utterances ? O Illustrious Monarch, I will now unfold my purpose, do thou fulfil it and prove the truth of thy words.

" O Chief of Men, when I undertake the observance of sacred sacrifices to enhance my perfection, two rakshasas, adepts in magic, create great impediments. When, after long effort, the sacrifice approaches consummation, then these two rakshasas, Maricha and Suvahu destroy the rite and defile the altar with blood and flesh. My holy endeavours being thus frustrated, I become despondent and leave the place of sacrifice. O King, it is not permitted to me to show wrath when engaged in sacrifice, and I therefore refrain from cursing them. Do thou lend me the services of thy son, Shri Ramachandra, the truthful, the brave, that hero, whose locks fall on his cheeks.

" Under my protection, he will destroy those mischievous rakshasas and I will confer great blessings on him. I will instruct him for his good in many sciences and he will become famous in the three worlds. The rakshasas will not be able to stand against Rama and no one else can destroy them. They are proud and powerful, but now, owing to their sins, their destruction is imminent, they will not be able to withstand Shri Ramachandra,

" Do not allow a father's affection to overcome thee ; I assure thee that in the presence of Shri Ramachandra, the rakshasas are as good as slain. Rama's virtues are known to Shri Vasishtha and other ascetics. O King, if thou seekest everlasting renown and merit in this world, then let Shri Rama go with me. Seek the advice of Shri Vasishtha and thy counsellors and if they approve the project, give me Ramachandra. Be pleased, O King, to give up thy beloved son for the space of ten days, so that I may complete the sacrifice. O King, help me in

furthering my sacrifice, and do not let the allotted time pass in vain. Do what is auspicious, do not grieve."

The upright and resplendent Sage Vishwamitra having uttered these righteous words, became silent.

The words of Shri Vishwamitra filled the king with anxiety and he became distraught. Because of these inexorable words, the monarch trembled and fell unconscious from his seat overcome with grief.

CHAPTER 20

The king's reluctance to allow Shri Rama to contend with Maricha and Suvahu

FOR some time the king lay insensible, then regaining consciousness he said: "My lotus-eyed Rama is but fifteen years old, I cannot believe he is capable of contending with the rakshasas. I possess a large and well-equipped army and will myself lead it against the demons. My seasoned warriors, who are courageous and skilled in bearing weapons and who are suitably remunerated by me, are fit to fight the rakshasas in battle; therefore, do not ask for Rama. I myself, bearing my bow and arrows, will lead the army in the field and fight to my last breath. With this protection, thy sacrifice will come to a successful conclusion. I will go thither in person, do not take away Shri Ramachandra. Shri Rama is still a child without military experience, he cannot estimate the strength or weakness of the enemy, he has not yet acquired proficiency in warfare.

"Thou knowest well, O Sage, how crafty are the rakshasas in combat. Shri Ramachandra is not capable of opposing them successfully. I cannot bear the thought of Ramachandra contending with them. O Sage, I shall not live, even for a moment, if Shri Rama be separated from me, therefore, I entreat thee, do not ask for him. Should'st thou insist on Rama accompanying thee, then take my forces also with thee. O August Vishwamitra, recollect I pray thee that I am now nine

thousand years old and have begotten these sons with great difficulty. These princes are dearer to me than life itself and Shri Ramachandra is the dearest of them all. Excelling in virtue, he is my eldest son, therefore, do not take him from me. O Great Sage, how powerful are these rakshasas? Who are their supporters and how dost thou imagine Shri Rama can destroy them? O Blessed Lord, say if thou deemest that I and my army may successfully oppose those rakshasas who are skilled in magic?"

Shri Vishwamitra answered: "O King, Ravana, born of the great family of Poulastya, having been favoured by Brahma with a boon, is oppressing the three worlds. He is exceedingly powerful and supported by many asuric followers. It is said that this great warrior Ravana is the King of Asuras. He is the brother of Kuvera and the son of the Sage Vishravas. He does not obstruct the lesser sacrifices in person, but two mighty rakshasas named Maricha and Suvahu, prompted by him, disrupt the sacrificial rites."

The king listened to the muni's words and then spoke: "I am not able to oppose that evil-souled asura. O Knower of the Law of Righteousness, I am but a wretched man and thou art worthy of my worship; thou art verily a god and also my spiritual preceptor. Since the gods, the danavas, gandharvas, yakshas, birds and snakes cannot destroy Ravana, how can man do so? In battle, Ravana is able to defeat the mightiest warriors, it is certain therefore, that neither I nor my army can contend with him. How can I then send my son, beautiful as a god, but inexperienced in war, to oppose Ravana? O Sage, I will not let my young child go. Lavana, the son of Madhu is among those who destroy the sacrifice. I will not give up my son. The sons of Sunda and Upasunda, Maricha and Suvahu, who resemble death itself in battle, are among those who impede the sacrifice. They are skilful and seasoned warriors, I dare not send my young son against them. Whoever thou chooseth, friends, relatives or even I myself will accompany thee to engage in the fight."

On hearing the king's injudicious words, the holy sage was enraged. As an oblation poured into the fire adds to the fierceness of the flame, so did the words of King Dasaratha add to the fire of anger kindled in the sage's heart.

CHAPTER 21

On Vasishtha's advice the king acquiesces

HEARING the words of King Dasaratha inspired by solicitude for his son, the great sage replied in displeasure :—

" O King, recollect that thou art born in the house of Raghu, how can'st thou presume to break thy promise ? This action is unworthy of thy royal line and is also improper. If this be thy determined desire, I will take my leave, do thou live at ease amidst thy relatives and friends, O Violater of thy Word ! "

At the wrath of the august sage, the whole earth shook and the gods began to tremble. Seeing the whole world shaken with terror, the wise and patient muni Shri Vasishtha intervened, and thus addressed the king :—

" O King, thou art born in the family of Ikshwaku and art righteousness personified ! Blessed by fortune, filled with patience and endurance, thou hast cherished great vows and should'st not, therefore, abandon dharma.[1] The three worlds know thee as virtuous, it is thy duty to maintain integrity and not to act in contradiction to it. O Chief of Men, if one making a promise does not honour it, he loses the merit of his good deeds. It is, therefore, for thee to be faithful to thy word and let Rama accompany this sage. Though Shri Ramachandra is inexperienced in warfare, yet the asuras will not be able to overcome him. Furthermore, he is under the protection of Shri Vishwamitra and no harm can come to him. How can one steal the nectar that is surrounded by fire ? The holy Vishwamitra is virtue itself, his powers are unsurpassed, and there is none living equal to him in wisdom and asceticism. In the whole world of men and other beings, none excels him in the use of weapons and none has fathomed the depth of his nature. Neither the celestials, nor the sages, nor the asuras, nor any other beings know the full glory of this sage. The god Krishasawa and his highly virtuous sons gave every variety of weapon to Vishwamitra when he was king. The two daughters

[1] Dharma—The traditional right action is dharma—personal action is duty. It has been thought best to translate it as righteousness in most cases.

of Daksha, Jaya and Suprabha invented thousands of resplendent weapons. Shri Vishwamitra is not one, but many in one form; he is illustrious, mighty and able to defeat any in battle. Jaya produced five hundred weapons supremely potent and capable of destroying a host of asuras. Suprabha also created five hundred weapons of war which no foe in the world could withstand. Shri Vishwamitra is an adept in the use of all these arms, O King, he is also able to create many new weapons and there is nothing in the three divisions of time[1] which is not known to him. Do not hesitate to send thy son Rama with this mighty and courageous sage, Shri Vishwamitra, and do not entertain any fears for his safety. The Sage Vishwamitra is well able to destroy the demons, but asks for the services of thy son for his own good."

The Guru Vasishtha having thus exhorted the monarch, the king cheerfully acquiesced to Shri Ramachandra accompanying the sage.

CHAPTER 22

Ramachandra and Lakshmana set forth with Vishwamitra

INSTRUCTED by Shri Vasishtha, King Dasaratha with a cheerful countenance sent for Prince Rama and also Prince Lakshmana. At the time of their departure, the Peace Chant was recited by the king, whilst the Guru Vasishtha pronounced the benediction. The illustrious sovereign then smelt the heads[2] of his sons with joy and delivered them into the care of the sage.

When the lotus-eyed Ramachandra and Prince Lakshmana had taken their leave, Vayu[3] sent forth cool and gentle breezes redolent with fragrance and the celestial beings showered down flowers, to the sound of the beating of drums and the blowing of conches.

[1] Past, present and future.
[2] The traditional embrace.
[3] Vayu—The god of the wind.

Shri Vishwamitra led the way followed by the most illustrious Ramachandra, then came Shri Lakshmana of flowing locks, bearing a bow in his hand.

The two handsome and powerful princes with quivers on their backs and bows in their hands, adding lustre to the ten cardinal points, followed the muni as if two three-headed snakes[1] were following Shri Vishwamitra or as the Aswinikumaras and Kinneras follow Brahma.

Shri Ramachandra and Lakshmana, armed with their bows, adorned with precious jewels and wearing gloves made of deerskin, resplendent and beautiful, girt with swords, following the holy sage, looked like the two sons of Shiva.

Coming to the river Sarayu, nine miles to the south of the capital, the Sage Vishwamitra addressed Shri Rama in gentle accents, saying: " O Child, purify thy body with water. When thou hast done so, I will teach thee the use of Bala and Atibala. The application of these two herbs will prevent thee from being fatigued or suffering from disease, nor will age affect thee. Even should'st thou retire to rest without performing the purification ceremony no demon will be able to afflict thee; none in the world will equal thee in prowess. O Rama, no one in the three worlds will rival thee in good fortune, skill, knowledge and practical wisdom. O Prince, when thou hast learnt these sciences, thou wilt be able to answer any question and thou wilt be unique in scholarship. These two sciences, O Rama, are the parents of all other sciences. Thou wilt be able to control hunger and thirst by their application. O Prince of the House of Raghu, by the mastery of this lore, Bala and Atibala, thou wilt attain renown throughout the whole world. These brilliant sciences are the daughters of Brahma, I shall impart them to thee, O Prince, because thou art qualified to receive them. O Rama, all the fruits of this knowledge are already thy attributes, yet when thou hast mastered it, thou wilt be able to teach it to others."

Shri Ramachandra then poured the water over his body and with a cheerful countenance said to the Sage Vishwamitra :—

" O Great Rishi, I am thy servant, teach me these sciences."

[1] The bow on one shoulder, the quiver on the other with the head between gave the appearance of a three-headed snake.

Possessed of the knowledge of these two sciences, the mighty Rama resembled the sun in autumn, emitting a thousand rays. Then the two brothers massaged the feet of the holy Guru and passed the night pleasantly on the banks of the river Sarayu. Shri Rama being unaccustomed to sleeping on the ground, the two sons of King Dasaratha made a bed of grass, then having listened to the gentle words of Shri Vishwamitra, they passed the night in sleep.

CHAPTER 23

They reach the hermitage of Kama

A LITTLE before dawn, the great Muni Vishwamitra, reclining on his grassy couch, addressed the princes, saying: " O Son of Queen Kaushalya, O Rama, the dawn is about to break, arise and perform thy morning devotions."

The two princes, hearing the words of the most generous sage, rose, performed their ablutions, offered ceremonial water to the rising sun, worshipped their ancestors and began to repeat the holy Gayatri.[1] Their devotions completed, they offered salutations with great reverence to the distinguished ascetic and stood ready to proceed further.

In their company, the holy sage reached the confluence of the rivers where the Ganges unites herself with the Sarayu. There they beheld the holy ascetics in their sacred hermitage, where for a long time they had practised Yoga assiduously.

Seeing the peaceful hermitage, Shri Ramachandra and Lakshmana were filled with delight and said to the Sage Vishwamitra: " O Blessed Lord, whose holy hermitage is this? Who dwells here? We are both eager to hear of this."

The great sage smiled and answered Rama, saying: " Hear, my son, I will tell thee who formerly dwelt here. Kandarpa,[2]

[1] The Gayatri—Said to be the mother of all prayers, the most sacred text of the Veda.

[2] Kandarpa—The god of love.

whom the pundits called Kama once took human form and fixed in meditation, worshipped the Lord Shiva here. When Shri Shiva was passing with his newly-wedded bride, accompanied by celestial beings, Kama tried to agitate the mind of the Lord Shiva and reaped the due punishment of his insolence. O Son of the House of Raghu, Shiva in wrath opened his third eye and the members of Kama's body were consumed. Since Kama was reduced to ashes by the God, he has been a disembodied being. O Rama, since that time, he has been known as Ananga (bodiless) and the country where his limbs were strewn as he sought to flee, is known as Anga. This hermitage belongs to the Lord Shiva and the holy men who dwell here are his traditional devotees : they are both righteous and sinless. O Rama, Thou of pleasing looks, this night I shall break my journey at this hermitage and to-morrow we shall cross the sacred river and proceed further. O Rama, let us first purify ourselves by bathing and then recite the holy Gayatri silently, offering oblations into the sacred fire, we will thereafter pass the night in the hermitage."

While Shri Rama and the sage were conversing, the holy ascetics dwelling in the hermitage, knew by the power of their Yoga, that these great beings were approaching and were highly gratified.

Having presented arghya to Shri Vishwamitra, they then offered hospitality to Shri Ramachandra and Lakshmana. Entertained by those dwelling in the hermitage who regaled them with the holy traditions and philosophical discourses, they remained there for their evening devotion and with great delight abode in the hermitage of Kama, the devout sages gathering round Shri Vishwamitra who engaged them in pleasing converse.

CHAPTER 24

The two princes with Vishwamitra behold the dark forest of Taraka

WHEN the day dawned, the two princes performed their daily devotions and followed Shri Vishwamitra to the river.

The keepers of sacred vows, the dwellers in the holy hermitage accompanied them to the river bank and arranged for an excellent boat to take them across; they said to Shri Vishwamitra :—

" O Great Rishi, do not delay, please board the vessel with the royal princes, now, and thus avoid the heat of the day."

Shri Vishwamitra paid reverence to the devout sages and proceeded to cross the sacred river. When the craft was in mid-stream, the roar of the waters was heard by Shri Ramachandra and his younger brother. They questioned the holy sage, saying: " O Venerable Lord, what is the cause of this tumult ? "

In answer to Shri Ramachandra, Shri Vishwamitra described the cause of the sound in the following manner :—

" O Prince, on Mount Kailasha,[1] Shri Brahma created a lake by the power of his thought, on account of which it is called the Lake of the Mind (Manasarovara). The holy river Sarayu rises in the Manasa Lake and flows through the capital Ayodhya, here it joins the sacred stream Gunga, and this sound is produced when the two rivers unite. With concentrated mind, offer salutations to them."

The two royal princes made obeisance to the rivers, and having reached the southern bank, left the boat and proceeded onward. Walking further, the two princes beheld a dark and terrible forest and Shri Ramachandra again addressed the Sage as follows : " O Great Sage, this forest looks dark and sinister; above the ceaseless clamour of crickets and other insects, fearful beasts can be heard roaring. The forest resounds with their dread cries while the harsh and discordant notes of birds echo

[1] Mt. Kailasha—The abode of Lord Shiva.

through it. See, O Sage! Boars, lions, tigers and elephants abound there, it is overgrown with dhara, ashwakarna, kujaja, patala, sillea and tinduka trees,[1] it is indeed terrifying."

The highly resplendent Sage Vishwamitra hearing these words, said: "My son, I will tell thee something of this dark forest. Formerly there were two cities named Malava and Karusha, they were both prosperous and resembled the cities built by the gods. O Rama, in ancient times, Indra slew the wicked Vritrasura then, being hungry and thirsty, he went to an inauspicious and isolated place where he became distressed on account of the sin of having slain a brahmin. The gods and holy sages bathed Indra in the sacred waters of the Ganges, and purged away his sin by pouring jars of water charged with mantrams over him. In this way, the remorse of Indra was appeased, the pollution caused by slaying a brahmin was washed away and he was highly gratified. Purified and sinless, Indra gladly conferred a boon on this land saying: 'These two cities will be known as Malava and Karusha and they will acquire great renown, their prosperity will be famed throughout the earth.'

"When Indra thus favoured these two cities, the celestial beings praised him and cried: 'Be it so.' These two places soon enjoyed great prosperity and fame. In the course of time, a perverse yakshini[2] was born here, possessing the strength of a thousand elephants. Her name was Taraka, the wife of Sunda, and her son was the rakshasa, Maricha, who was equal in strength to Indra himself. He possessed long arms, an enormous mouth, and a gigiantic body. This terrible rakshasa continually destroys the people of these two lands.

"O Rama, the wicked Taraka constantly plunders and devastates these two countries. Obstructing the road, she lives at two miles distance from here; let us enter the forest of Taraka. By my command, O Rama, do thou slay the wicked yakshini and set the country free. O Rama, none dares to come hither for fear of Taraka; save this land from the dangerous demoness. This is why this forest is uninhabited, but thou can'st restore it. This wicked yakshini is unceasingly bent on her evil designs."

[1] See separate glossary of Flowers and Trees.
[2] Yakshini—a female yaksha, a class of supernatural beings attendant on the god of wealth, Kuvera.

CHAPTER 25

Vishwamitra seeks to convince Rama that it is his duty to slay Taraka

HEARING the words of Shri Vishwamitra, Shri Rama of limitless power and influence uttered the following auspicious words :—

" O Great Sage, it is said that the yakshinis have little power, then how is it that Taraka has come to possess the strength of a thousand elephants ? "

The mahatma listened to Rama's words and said : " O Prince, I will relate the story to thee. This female demon has acquired her great strength by virtue of a boon which she received. In the past, a powerful yaksha by the name of Suketu, who was virtuous but childless, performed many yogic practices which pleased Shri Brahma, who promised him a daughter by name Taraka, and conferred on her the strength of a thousand elephants. But the most illustrious Brahma did not grant a son to that yaksha. When the daughter grew up and possessed both the charm of youth and great beauty, her father gave her in marriage to Sunda, the son of Jambha. After some time, the yakshini gave birth to a son. His name was Maricha and he was very powerful ; though born of yaksha parentage he became a rakshasa through a curse. O Rama, when the Sage Agastya condemned Sunda to death by cursing him, then Taraka and her son wished to devour the sage. Seeing her running towards him, the blessed Sage Agastya cursed Maricha and said ' Become a demon '. He also cursed that wicked woman so that she became a cannibal with a hideous countenance. Shri Agastya said : ' May thy beauty vanish and mayest thou become a terrible rakshasi.' Then Taraka, transported with anger under this curse, began to destroy this sacred land because it was here that the Sage Agastya performed his yogic practices.

" O Rama, thou must slay this wicked and impious demon Taraka, who ravages the land. For the good of the brahmins and the king, O Raghava, accomplish this ; do not hesitate to destroy this vile yakshini. It is the duty of a warrior to protect those of the four castes. A prince must not eschew

deeds that are painful and difficult, for the preservation of his people. It is according to the law of eternal dharma, O Rama, that even deeds that appear ruthless, are permitted to those appointed to protect their subjects. O Raghava, Taraka is wholly evil, and therefore must be destroyed. It is said that in the past Manthara, a daughter of King Virochana, was slain by Indra because she was the cause of the destruction of others. The blessed Lord Vishnu Himself slew the wife of the Sage Bhrigu, devoted to her husband, and the mother of Shukra because she was intent on killing Indra. Many other great-souled princes of old also condemned wicked women to death. Therefore, it is for thee to fulfil thy duty and slay this yakshini without delay."

CHAPTER 26

How the yakshini Taraka was slain

THE son of Dasaratha, firm in his vows, listened to the inspiring words of the Sage Vishwamitra, which filled him with ardour, and with joined palms he humbly addressed him :—

" To fulfil the commands of my royal sire and to honour his promise, I deem it my duty to act according to thy instructions without hesitation. My father, the emperor, at the time of my departure from Ayodhya bade me carry out thy injunctions —O Muni, I shall honour them. I am prepared to execute thy commands, O Rishi, because it will lead to the benefit of the brahmins and the king, and will also bring happiness to the people of this land."

Having spoken thus, Shri Rama grasped his bow and, twanging the string, filled all the cardinal points with the sound. The denizens of the forest were terrified, and Taraka was overcome with helpless rage. Full of wrath that yakshini ran in the direction from which the sound came and Shri Ramachandra beholding that gigantic and misshapen monster was incensed and said to Lakshmana: " O Brother, behold this

fearful yakshini of formidable size, whose very aspect would strike terror into timorous hearts. See, O Lakshmana, how I shall cut off her ears and nose and put her to flight! She is horrible, versed in black magic and hard to subdue, but it is not proper to deprive a woman of her life. A woman is worthy of protection, therefore, I shall incapacitate her, by depriving her of the power of motion thus preventing her from doing further mischief."

While Shri Rama was still speaking, the dreadful Taraka ran towards him roaring with uplifted arms. The Rishi Vishwamitra approaching her encouraged Rama, with a shout, crying, "Jai to the descendant of Raghu". Notwithstanding, Taraka raised a thick cloud of dust and for a while Shri Rama and Lakshmana could see nothing. Then the yakshini by the power of magic caused a shower of rocks to rain on the two brothers and Rama was now filled with wrath. Parrying the rain of rocks and advancing towards her, he cut off both her hands. Then Shri Lakshmana severed the nose and ears of the asuri who had already been deprived of her hands. Assuming various forms, she tried to deceive the princes by vanishing away. Then from her hiding place, she showered heavy rocks on them, and a rain of stones fell on every side.

Shri Vishwamitra, who stood watching the combat, now cried: "Enough, she does not deserve further mercy; should'st thou spare her, she will gain strength through her magic powers and will again break up our holy rites. The evening is approaching and in the evening rakshasas are overcome with difficulty; slay her, therefore, without delay."

Then Shri Vishwamitra pointed out the concealed yakshini to Rama, who drew from his quiver arrows capable of following sound and surrounded her with them. The powerful female demon, an adept in occult powers, encompassed by the rain of arrows, advanced roaring, towards the princes. With an arrow, Shri Rama pierced the heart of the wicked yakshini, who fell to the ground and expired. Seeing the terrible yakshini slain, Indra and other celestial beings worshipped Shri Rama, crying: "Well done, well done, O Holy Rama!" All the gods filled with joy, said to Shri Vishwamitra: "O Muni, may prosperity attend thee, Indra and the gods are gratified with

Shri Ramachandra's feat of arms, show thy special favour to him *and deliver to him the two kinds of weapons, natural and supernatural*, belonging to Krishashwa. Present Shri Ramachandra, who is worthy to receive them, with all the other mighty weapons, he is wholly devoted to thee; these two princes are destined to achieve great things."

Having uttered these words, the gods bowed down to the Sage Vishwamitra and returned to their abode.

Evening fell, and the holy sage gladdened by the slaying of the wicked Taraka by Shri Rama, smelt the head of the prince and addressed him thus: " O Rama, this night we will remain here and to-morrow morning proceed to my hermitage."

Shri Rama rejoiced to hear the muni's words and rested happily during the night in the forest.

On the day that Taraka was slain, the forest, freed from the curse, adorned with champaka,[1] ashoka,[1] mango and other trees, looked as charming as the forest of Chitraratha.[2]

Shri Ramachandra, whom the siddhas praised for slaying Taraka, passed the night in the forest, awaiting the dawn.

CHAPTER 27

Shri Rama is given the celestial weapons

HAVING passed the night resting in the forest, the illustrious Sage Vishwamitra spoke to Rama smilingly, in sweet accents:—

" O Prince of Great Renown, I am entirely satisfied with thee and am happy to give thee these weapons by means of which thou shalt be able to conquer and subdue all thine enemies, whether devas, asuras or nagas.[3] Accept these divine weapons,[4] O Rama. Here is the great celestial disc and the Dunda weapon,

[1] Champaka—a type of magnolia.
Ashoka—a tree resembling the coconut. } For full list of trees see separate glossary.
[2] Chitraratha—The king of the gandharvas, q.v. page 3.
[3] Nagas—The serpent race.
[4] Weapons—for full list see separate glossary.

the Disc of Dharma, the Kala weapon, the Disc of Vishnu and the irresistible Weapon of Indra. O Great Prince, here is the Mace and the Spear of Mahendra the Brahma-Shira and the Ishika. O Mighty-armed One, take the Shankara weapon and the two great maces Koumoduki and Lohitamukhi. O Great Prince receive also the mighty Dharma-pasha, the Kala-pasha and the Varuna-pasha and two other maces called Shoshka and Ashani; the Pinaka weapon, the Narayana weapon and the fire-emitting weapon Agneya.

" O Rama, take this wind weapon, Vayuvya, and the horse-headed weapon, Hayashira, also the Krauncha weapon. I give thee further two powers and the weapons called Kankala, Mushala, Rapala and Kinkini. O Mighty Prince, I confer on thee the two supernatural weapons named Vidyadhara and Nandana, useful in fighting the Asuras.

" Take this jewel among swords, which I give to thee, O Mighty-armed One, and another supernatural weapon named Gandharva, and here, O Rama, is one very dear to me called Manava. Here are Prashaman, Soura, Praswaprana, Darpana and that which has the power of drying up, and the pain-inflicting weapon causing lamentation. I grant thee also the strength to bear the Madana-astra presented to me by Kandarpa which creates in man unbearable sexual desire so that he is unable to fight. Here also is the Paisha-astra and the Mohan-astra.

" O! Illustrious Prince, receive also the weapon that produces inertia, and the great Saumana weapon. O Great Prince, here are the Samvartta, Moushalya, Sattyastra and Mayadhara, and take the Tajaprabha by means of which the strength and courage of the foe are withdrawn, and also the Shishira which chills and the Somastra and Twashtra.

" O Rama, now thou art all-powerful and knowest the secrets of magic, yet take the Bava, Shitesu and Manava astra also. O Prince, receive the Paramodara-astra, take all these weapons from me."

Then the great Vishwamitra turned his face to the east and performed the purificatory rites with joy, conferring on Rama the mantrams[1] for employing the weapons and instructing him

[1] Mantrams—sacred formulas.

in the methods unknown even to the gods. All these weapons did Shri Vishwamitra confer on Rama, and he, repeating the appropriate mantrams, caused their presiding deities to appear before him. Approaching with joined palms, they said: "O Prince of the House of Raghu, we are thy servants and will obey thy behests."

Shri Rama, having surveyed and blessed them, answered: "Come and serve me when I summon you."

Thereafter, Shri Ramachandra offering salutations to the venerable Sage Vishwamitra, said: "Let us proceed further, my Lord."

CHAPTER 28

He is instructed in their use

HAVING received the weapons and instructions for their use, Shri Rama addressed the sage in charming accents as they proceeded onward.

He said: "O Blessed One, by thy grace, I have received weapons which even the devas and asuras cannot easily obtain. Be pleased to tell me further, how I may withdraw these weapons when they are discharged?"

Then the supremely patient and holy sage taught Shri Ramachandra the method of withdrawing the mantra-propelled weapons and gave him more by the name of Satya-vana, Satya-kirti, Dhrishta, Raphasa, Pratiharatara, Parangmukha, Avangmukha, Lakshya, Alakshya, Drirnabha and Sunabhuka, Dasharsha, Shutavaktra, Dasha-shirsha, Shatodara, Dharma-nabha and Maha-nabha, Dunda-nabha and Swanabhuka, Jyotisha and Shakuna and the two weapons Nirashya and Vimala, also the Yogandhara and Vinidra, Ditya and Pramanthana, Shuchivahu, Mahavanu, Nishkali, Virucha, Sarchi-mali Dhriti and Mali, Vrittiman and Ruchira, Pitryia and Soamanas-vidhuta and Makara, Karavira with Rati, Dhana and Dhanya.

The holy sage said, "O Rama, receive also Kamarupa, Kamaruchi, Moha and Avarana, also Jrim Bhala, Sarpa-natha

with Sandhana and Varuna. Receive from me, O Rama, the Krishashwa which assumes any form—O Prince, mayest thou be triumphant, thou art worthy to possess these weapons". Shri Rama answered " May it be so, my Lord ".

The holy rishi[1] then placed the divine weapons before Rama, some of which shone like fire, others with the colour of smoke and yet others which resembled the sun and moon. With joined palms the deities presiding over them addressed Shri Rama with submission, saying: " O Prince, we are at thy service, what would'st thou have us accomplish ? " Shri Rama answered: " When called to mind in the time of need, grant me aid, now depart, all of you."

Offering obeisance to Shri Ramachandra, they replied: " Be it so, my Lord," and returned to their abode.

Shri Rama then questioned the great rishi, saying: " O Spiritual Sovereign, what is this that resembles a dark cloud near the mountain ? It would seem to be a grove of trees, pleasing to the sight, filled with deer. I hear birds singing sweetly, have we then passed the dangerous forest which was a cause of fear ? O Lord, let us rest here at peace; tell me, whose hermitage is this ? O Great Muni, are we now in thine own hermitage, where the wicked demons, the slayers of brahmins obstruct thy sacrifice ? O Blessed One, be pleased to show me the place of thy sacrifice. O Wise One, I will slay the meddlesome demons who hinder thy devotions. Be gracious enough to enlighten me in the matter, O Sage."

CHAPTER 29

Vishwamitra relates the story of his hermitage and commences the sacrifice

To the most glorious Shri Ramachandra making enquiry concerning the forest, the illustrious Sage Vishwamitra made answer:—

[1] Rishi—an illumined sage, who has had a vision of Truth or Reality.

"O Rama, this is the place at which the Blessed Lord Vishnu, the first among the gods, dwelt, observing his yogic practices for immeasurable years and previous to that, it belonged to the glorious Vamana.[1] This spot is called Siddha-ashrama, for here, these great souls practised austerities with success. At that time, Bali the son of King Virochana, conquered Indra and other devas, together with the deities of the wind and he ruled over the three worlds. When Bali initiated a sacrifice, the devas, under the leadership of Agni[2] approached Shri Vishnu in this hermitage and said: 'O Lord, the son of Virochana, King Bali is observing a great sacrifice; while it is yet incomplete, come to our aid. The Lord grants the requests of those who seek His favour, therefore, by the power of Thy Yoga and for our own good, take the form of a dwarf (Vamana) and secure our welfare.' Meantime, O Rama, the Sage Kashyapa, resplendent as fire, who was endowed with supreme lustre by virtue of his yogic practices, with his spouse Aditi, having completed a thousand years' austerities, began to praise Madhusudana, the conferrer of boons, saying: 'O Supreme Purusha,[3] Thou art adored through austerity and Thou dost grant the fruit of austerity, Thy nature is knowledge and asceticism, it is by virtue of austerity that I behold Thee. O Lord, in Thy body I see the whole world animate and inanimate. In Thee Who art beginningless and indescribable, I take refuge.'

"The blessed Vishnu was pleased with this prayer and said to the sinless Sage: 'O Kashyapa, mayest thou see perfection, thou hast merited a boon, ask what thou desirest.'

"Then Kashyapa, the son of Marichi, answered: 'O Blessed Lord, Aditi, the gods and I beseech Thee to grant this boon—Become the son of my sinless wife and myself. O Lord, become the younger brother of Indra and assist the sorrow-stricken devas. This spot, by Thy grace, shall then be known as Siddha-Ashrama.' (Hermitage of the Perfect Ones.)

"Upon this, the resplendent Vishnu was born of the womb of Aditi as the incarnation Vamana and disguised as a mendicant, he approached King Bali. Of him, he requested a piece of

[1] Vamana—An incarnation of Shri Vishnu as the holy Dwarf.
[2] Agni—The god of fire.
[3] Purusha—The Supreme Being, the Soul of the Universe. Literally the Lord of the body, called the city of the nine gates.

ground that could be covered by three strides, and having obtained what he asked, he covered the whole universe in three steps.

"This restful hermitage formerly belonging to Vamana, whose devotee I am, is enjoyed by me. Here the rakshasas wreak destruction. O Lion among men, remain here and slay them. O Rama, to-day let us enter the Siddha-Ashrama together. O Friend, this hermitage is not only mine but thine also."

Accompanied by Shri Ramachandra and Lakshmana, the holy sage entered the hermitage, which appeared as beautiful as the autumn moon attended by the planet Punarvasu.[1] When the sages dwelling in the Siddha-Ashrama perceived Shri Vishwamitra, they rose and saluted him with joy. Having duly honoured the resplendent sage, they entertained the princes in a fitting manner.

Having rested awhile, the two princes humbly and respectfully addressed the holy sage, saying: "O Great Sage, inaugurate thy sacrifice to-day, may it be attended with good fortune. This place is the Siddha-Ashrama, we wish thee success in thy undertaking."

Thereupon the great sage with due preparation, his mind subdued, began the sacrifice while the two princes kept vigil. Having passed the night in this manner, in accordance with the prescribed rules, they performed their ablutions, repeating the mantram silently, they then paid respect to Shri Vishwamitra and occupied their seats as do those performing a fire-sacrifice.

CHAPTER 30

Maricha and Suvahu obstruct the sacrifice and are slain by Rama

THE two princes, knowing what was appropriate in respect to time and place and skilled in the art of conquering their foes, uttered words fitting to the place and occasion.

[1] Punarvasu—The seventh of the lunar asterisms, called Nakshatras or wives of the moon. Punarvasu is the most beloved.

They said: " O Blessed One, we desire to hear at what moment in the course of the sacrifice, the two demons appear? It is essential for us to be acquainted with the matter, to forestall their attack."

The dwellers in the Siddha-ashrama, hearing the words of the princes, and finding them eager to fight the demons, praised them saying: " O Princes, from now on, keep watch over the sacrifice for six days; the Sage Vishwamitra having begun the rite will observe a strict silence during that time."

On this, the two illustrious princes kept watch in the Tapovana forest continuously for six days without sleeping. Armed with bow and arrows they guarded the rishi and his sacrifice with firm resolve. Five days passed without interruption and on the sixth day Shri Ramachandra said to Lakshmana: " Brother, be prepared to-day."

As Shri Rama uttered these words concerning the approaching conflict with the demons, the altar fire blazed up suddenly. The officiating brahmin, the priest and Shri Vishwamitra, who were watching, beheld all the sacrificial implements set on fire.

The sacrifice of the holy sage still proceeding, a great and fearful clamour resounded in the firmament. As in the rainy season, clouds cover the sky, so the demons by the power of magic began to course through the air.

Maricha and Suvahu and other demons surrounding the altar, let fall torrents of blood. Seeing the altar deluged with blood, Shri Ramachandra and Lakshmana were filled with anger and ran to discover the cause. Then they saw Maricha and other demons in the sky. Raghava beholding the demons rushing towards him, said to Lakshmana, " O Lakshmana, see these evil flesh-eating demons, I shall destroy them with the Manava-weapon, as the wind scatters the clouds ".

So saying, Shri Ramachandra hurled the shining Manava weapon at them and striking the breast of Maricha, inflicted a wound. Thus smitten, the demon was flung into the sea, a distance of a hundred miles. Perceiving Maricha reeling, struck senseless by the Manava weapon, Shri Ramachandra addressed Lakshmana, saying: " Behold the power of this great weapon created by the muni! Yet, though Maricha has been deprived of his senses, he is not dead; verily I shall now destroy

those wicked, merciless and sinful blood-drinking demons who obstruct the holy sacrifice." So saying, he seized the fire-weapon and discharged it at the breast of Suvahu, who straightway fell to the ground and expired. On this, Shri Rama destroyed the remaining demons with the air-weapon (Vayuvya).

Thus by slaying the obstructors of the sacrifice did Shri Ramachandra bring delight to the hearts of the sages and was worshipped by them as was formerly the victorious Indra.

When the sacrifice had been successfully completed, perceiving the world to be freed from the interference of the asuras, the Rishi Vishwamitra said to Rama :—

" O Mighty-armed Prince, to-day I have fulfilled my spiritual purpose, thou hast obeyed the commands of thy Guru perfectly, truly thou hast made the Siddha-Ashrama worthy of its name."

CHAPTER 31

Vishwamitra starts out with the two princes to attend King Janaka's sacrifice

THE great hero, the ever-cheerful Rama, together with Lakshmana having successfully assisted Shri Vishwamitra, passed the night in the hermitage.

At dawn, after purifying themselves, they approached Shri Vishwamitra and offered obeisance to him and the other sages. Bowing down before the great muni, who was as resplendent as a blazing fire, they addressed him in submissive tones, saying : " O Great Rishi, we are both thy humble servants, what further commands are there for us ? We are here to obey."

The other rishis, led by Shri Vishwamitra, listened to the words of Shri Ramachandra and answered saying : " O Great One, the King of Mithila, the righteous Janaka is performing a holy sacrifice and we shall attend it. O Great Beings, be pleased to accompany us ; there you will see a rare and wonderful bow. In ancient days this bow was given by the devas to

Janaka, it is exceedingly heavy and splendid. Neither gandharvas nor asuras can bend this great bow, how much less man? To test their skill, great kings have come to the assembly of King Janaka, but none has succeeded in raising the bow and stringing it. O Illustrious One, let us go and see the sacrifice of the King of Mithila and also that marvellous bow. In former days, King Janaka performed a sacrifice and the fruit of it was the great bow which he obtained from the gods who instructed him saying: 'Place this bow in the sacrificial chamber and let it be worshipped with incense, perfume and lights'."

Shri Vishwamitra having related these facts, started out accompanied by the two princes and other sages. Invoking the Vanadevata (Forest Deity) he said to him: "My sacrifice has come to a successful conclusion, may happiness be thine. I am leaving the Siddha-Ashrama for the banks of the sacred river Gunga on the slopes of the Himalayas, situated in the domain of King Janaka."

Then the sage reverently circumambulated the hermitage and turned northwards. As Shri Vishwamitra entered upon his journey, the sages skilled in the knowledge of the science of Brahman, accompanied him with their chattels placed on hundreds of waggons. The birds and beasts of the hermitage also followed them for a long way until the holy muni requested them to turn back.

The sages and the holy muni reached the banks of the river Shona at sunset and, having bathed and recited their evening prayers, performed the fire sacrifice.

Shri Ramachandra and Prince Lakshmana then offered salutations to Shri Vishwamitra and the other rishis, and sat down before them. Thereafter Shri Rama cheerfully enquired: "O Lord, what country is this, covered with verdant groves? Be gracious enough to relate everything concerning it."

The great ascetic of firm vows, was pleased to hear these words and, sitting amidst the sages, he described the country fully to them.

CHAPTER 32

Vishwamitra tells of his ancestors and the dynasty of King Kusha

"O RAMA, in times of yore, there was a king named Kusha, he was the son of a brahmin, a noted ascetic, faithful to his vows, conversant with dharma and ever revered by the virtuous. He wedded a high-born woman of great beauty named Bhidharvi, and begat four sons, each resembling himself. Their names were Kushamba, Kushanabha, Umurita-rajasa and Basu; these four princes were mighty and active, and desirous of teaching them the duties of a kshatriya, the truthful and righteous King Kusha addressed them as follows:—

"'O My Sons, protect and nourish your subjects, this practice is productive of great merit.'

"In order to carry out the instructions of their sire, these princes founded four cities and named them after themselves. The mighty Kushamba called his city Kaushambi, and the righteous Kushanabha founded the city of Mahodaya. O Rama, Prince Umurita-rajasa founded the city named Dhar-maranya and the Prince Basu called his city Giribrat, also named Basumati. This city was surrounded by five mountain peaks and the river Magadhi or Shona meandering through the mountains resembled a lovely garland. O Rama, this stream the Magadhi flows towards the east and irrigates the fruitful fields on either bank.

"O Prince of Raghu, Kushanabha took in wedlock a nymph named Ghritachi and by her had one hundred beautiful daughters, who on reaching maturity were delightful to look upon. One day, clad in lovely dresses, in beauty of form unparalleled they wandered in the garden like lightning amidst the clouds. Singing, dancing and playing on instruments they seemed to be divine forms which had materialised and descended on the earth, or like the stars in the firmament.

"Seeing those lovely and virtuous princesses, Vayu the wind

god thus addressed them: 'I entreat you all to be wedded to me; give up your mortal form, I will render you immortal. Remember youth is passing and youth among mortals passes even more swiftly; wedded to me, you will be beautiful for ever.'

" The damsels listened to the improper speech of the wind god and replied mockingly: 'O Deity of the Wind, thou knowest all that is passing in the hearts of men, but we know what is passing in thy heart. Why dost thou insult us, O Wind? O Vayu, who art renowned for thy wisdom, we virgins by the power of our devotion and self-control can effect thy downfall, but because the merits of the righteous come to nought when they cause harm to others, we shall preserve our sacred vows inviolate. O Stupid One, heaven forfend that we choose husbands for ourselves without first seeking the approval of our honoured sire. He is as a god to us and our master, and we shall wed the husbands he chooses for us.'

" The wind god was enraged and entering their bodies, twisted and distorted them. Thus afflicted, the princesses in tears, approached their father for assistance.

" The king was grieved to see his daughters in this condition and said: 'O speak, what has occurred? Who, disregarding justice, has deformed you? Tell me all.' The monarch was deeply moved by this event and his heart became heavy."

CHAPTER 33

King Kushanabha's hundred daughters

WHEN the hundred princesses were thus questioned by the king their father, they placed their heads at his feet and answered: " The wind god, who pervades all, has entered the evil path and desired us to forsake virtuous conduct. We told him we were not free to choose our way of life since our father was still living and that he should consult thee if he wished to wed us, but that sinful god, disregarding our request has twisted and deformed our bodies in this manner."

The great king hearing the complaint of the hundred virgins, said to them: "You have acted nobly by practising forbearance towards the deity. It is meet that the generous-minded should exercise forbearance, you have added to the honour of our dynasty. Forbearance is the chief ornament of both man and woman, you have achieved something rare; few are capable of such forbearance. O Virgins, forbearance is charity, forbearance is truth, forbearance is sacrifice. A man's true glory is forbearance; forbearance is dharma. The world is established in forbearance."

Having spoken thus, the princesses were comforted, and the king dismissed them. Then the monarch, mighty like a god, summoned his ministers and consulted them regarding the alliance of his daughters to suitable families at the proper time and place.

Now a great muni named Chuli full of glory derived from prolonged celibacy and highly virtuous, was engaged in sacred austerities for the purpose of spiritual liberation.

At that place, the virgin daughter of the nymph Urmila, named Somada, began to minister to the muni. She attended on the great sage for a long time with undeviating faith and devotion and her Guru was pleased with her; he said to her: "I am pleased with thee, what desire of thine shall I fulfil?"

Perceiving the muni to be highly pleased, that sweet-voiced nymph acquainted with the art of conversation made answer to him: "O King of Kings, I desire to bear a son, resplendent with divine power, a worshipper of God and devoted to dharma. I have no husband, nor do I wish to be the wife of any, as I am a brahmacharini,[1] therefore, by virtue of thy Yoga, grant me a son produced by the power of thy thought."

The divine Sage Chuli was pleased to hear these words and granted her a son named Brahmadatta, by the power of his mind. Brahmadatta became King of Kampila and was as prosperous as Indra in heaven. King Kushanabha resolved to give his daughters in marriage to King Brahmadatta. Kushanabha requested King Brahmadatta to visit him and joyfully gave him his daughters in marriage.

[1] Brahmachari or brahmacharini—male or female celibate religious student who lives with the teacher and is devoted to the practice of spiritual discipline.

O Ramaji, King Brahmadatta, who was equal to Indra in glory wedded the princesses one by one by taking their hands in his. Through the touch of his hand, the princesses were freed from their deformity and restored to their former beauty. When King Kushnabha beheld his daughters released from their disfigurement and restored to their former beauty he was filled with joy.

Thus did the King Kushnabha give his daughters in marriage to King Brahmadatta and then commanded their preceptors to accompany them to the court of his son-in-law.

Somada was delighted with the union of her son to the damsels and receiving them with great affection, commended the virtuous King Kushanabha.

CHAPTER 34

His son, Gadhi, is the father of Vishwamitra

" O RAMAJI, after the wedding of his daughters, the sinless King Kushanabha prepared to perform a sacrifice in order to obtain a son.

"At the inauguration of the sacrifice, the munificent King Kusha, son of Shri Brahma, said to Kushanabha : ' O my Son, thou wilt obtain a son like thyself, he should be named Gadhi, he will bring thee immortal renown.'

"After some time a son was born to the wise King Kushanabha who was a lover of virtue, and his name was Gadhi. This Gadhi, O Rama, was my virtuous father[1] and because I was born in the family of Kusha I was called Kaushika.

" I had, O Prince, an elder sister named Satyavati, who became the faithful spouse of Richika. When her lord died, she ascended to heaven and took the form of the Kaushiki river. The river is sacred and beautiful, and its waters confer merit on men. To bless the world Satyavati became the river flowing near the Himalayas.

[1] The Rishi Vishwamitra is still speaking here.

"O Prince, through love of my sister, I dwell on the banks of the Kaushiki river near the Himalayas.

"Established in truth, faithful to her lord, that sister of mine, named Satyavati is to-day the river Kaushiki, great among streams and highly fortunate.

"O Rama, in order to perform a sacrifice, I went to the Siddha ashrama, I have now accomplished my purpose.

"O Rama, at thy instance, I have told thee of my family and origin ; the night is far spent in listening to this tale, now rest, so that, refreshed, we may resume our journey to-morrow. Peace be with thee !

"The leaves of the trees are motionless, the birds and beasts are silent and darkness covers all. How imperceptibly the evening has passed away. The sky is brilliant with stars, as if a thousand eyes gazed down on us.

"The bright moon with its cool beams, slowly rising higher and higher dispels the darkness. Nocturnal wanderers and the terrible flesh-eating yakshas prowl about here and there."

Having uttered these words, the great Sage Vishwamitra became silent. The other munis praised him saying : "Well spoken, well spoken, O Sage."

They said : "The dynasty of Kusha has ever practised righteousness and the kings of this line have been eminent in virtue. Of this dynasty, thou, O Vishwamitra, art the most illustrious, the fame of this royal line has been enhanced by the beautiful river Kaushiki."

Thus did the great sages praise the Rishi Vishwamitra, who then withdrew to rest, as the sun sets behind a mountain.

Shri Ramachandra and his brother Lakshmana, full of wonder also made obeisance to the holy sage and retired to sleep.

CHAPTER 35

Vishwamitra begins to narrate the origin of the holy river Gunga

HAVING passed the night with the other munis on the banks of the river Shona, Shri Vishwamitra said to Prince Rama at daybreak: "Arise, O Prince, the day has dawned, may prosperity attend thee! Perform thy morning devotions and let us prepare for our journey."

Shri Rama listened to the instructions of the holy sage, recited his morning prayers and prepared to leave, saying: " O Knower of God, the waters of the holy river Shona appear to be very shallow and rest on a sandy bed, be pleased to instruct us where we should cross over it."

The sage replied: " O Prince, I will show thee where the great rishis traversed it." Thereafter they forded the river and journeyed on and on, enjoying the many beautiful woods and forests through which they passed.

After proceeding a great distance, late one afternoon, they reached the holy river Ganges, beloved of the sages. On beholding the lovely river rendered beautiful by the presence of swans and cranes, Rama, Lakshmana and the sages were filled with delight.

They halted on the banks and bathed in the sacred river as prescribed by the holy ordinance, then lighting their sacrificial fires they partook of the remains of the offerings. According to the tradition, they offered water to their ancestors and spreading coverings, seated themselves by the holy Ganges.

Sitting in the midst of the sages with the two princes before him, Shri Vishwamitra was questioned by Shri Rama in the following manner:—

" O Lord, I desire to hear the story of this holy river, which traverses the three paths.[1] How does the sacred Gunga, passing through the three worlds merge at last in the ocean? "

[1] In Hindu mythology the universe is divided into the three worlds: Bhur, Bhuvah, Swah, the lower, middle and upper worlds. The sacred river is said to traverse all three.

On this request, Shri Vishwamitra began to narrate the origin and genesis of the sacred river.

" O Rama, the great Himavat, Lord of the Himalayas, the treasury of all precious metals, had two daughters, who were unsurpassed in loveliness on earth. Their mother Mena, the wife of Himachala (Himavat) was the daughter of Mount Meru. Her elder daughter was named Gunga and the younger Uma.

" The devas wishing to observe certain sacred rites, asked for Shri Gunga to promote the success of their undertaking and with the permission of her father, took her away with them.

" Himachala, mindful of the good of all beings, gave his daughter Gunga, the purifier of the whole world, to the gods, thinking it to be his duty to do so. The gods supremely gratified took his daughter Gunga and blessing all, left Himachala.

" O Prince of the House of Raghu, the other daughter of Himachala, named Uma, practised great asceticism, considering it to be her chief wealth. Himachala gave this ascetic daughter Uma, who was venerated by the whole world, to Shri Mahadeva[1] in marriage, thinking him to be a worthy consort.

" O Rama, now I have told thee of the two daughters of Himachala, revered by the whole world, the river Gunga and Uma Devi.

" O my Son, O Chief of Disciples, I have related to thee the story of Shri Gunga accompanying the devas to heaven. This beautiful daughter of the King of Himalaya, once resident in heaven, is the charming river Gunga, whose waters destroy all sin."

CHAPTER 36

The story of the king of Himalayas' younger daughter Uma

HEARING the wonderful narrative, so eloquently related by Shri Vishwamitra, both the princes praised the holy sage and said: " O Divine Sage, thou hast told us a tale, by the hearing of

[1] Mahadeva—A title of the Lord Shiva.

which great merit is acquired, be gracious enough to enlighten us further regarding the elder daughter of the King of Himalaya. Thou art omniscient, therefore describe to us fully, how the Gunga, the world purifying stream, came down from heaven to earth. O Thou, versed in the science of dharma, why is this sacred river called Tripathaga (the Traverser of the Three Worlds) and whence is this name derived ? "

Seated amidst the other sages, Shri Vishwamitra, whose only wealth was truth and austerity, spoke as follows, in answer to Shri Rama's questioning :—

" O Prince, in ancient times, the holy Lord Mahadeva was wedded to Parvati[1] and being charmed with her beauty devoted himself to the delights of connubial bliss. According to the measure of time of the gods, the Lord Mahadeva passed a hundred years with that devi[2] but remained without issue. In their anxiety, the gods approached Shri Brahma and said :—

" ' Who will be able to endure the power and glory of the offspring produced by these two mighty beings ? '

" They then took refuge with Shri Mahadeva, saying : ' O God of Gods, O Mahadeva, ever engaged in doing good to all beings, we offer salutations to thee, be gracious unto us ! Thy power, O First among the Gods, none can endure, therefore with this goddess engage in yogic penances. For the welfare of the three worlds, retain thine energy within thy body so that the universe may be preserved and may not suffer destruction '."

The Ruler of the World, Shri Mahadeva, listened to the words of the devas and said : " Be it so, O Devas, I will restrain my power so that all the regions including the earth may dwell in peace, but O Devas, should my vital fluid overflow, who shall receive it ? "

The gods answered Shri Mahadeva, saying : " Let the earth receive it."

Then Shri Mahadeva let fall his seed on the earth covering the mountains, seas and forests. When the earth could bear no more, the devas asked the wind and fire deities to combine

[1] Parvati—The consort of the Lord Shiva.
[2] Devi—another name for Parvati. Devi literally means goddess or shining one.

with that creative power and thus was a white mountain created and later a heavenly forest as resplendent as the light of the sun. From this fiery light was born the glorious Swami Karttikeya.[1]

"All the gods and rishis were full of joy and adored the Lord Shiva and the goddess Uma. As they worshipped them with grateful hearts, Uma was filled with wrath and said : 'O Devas, your action has filled me with displeasure, you shall not escape the consequences.'

" Then Uma shining like the sun, took water in the palm of her hand and pronounced a curse on the gods, saying : 'O Devas, you have prevented me from bearing a son, may you be childless from this day, may your wives be without progeny.'

" Still not appeased, Uma cursed the earth also and said : 'O Earth, thou shalt never remain in one form, thou shalt have many masters. O Witless One, thou shalt never bear a son, since thou hast prevented me from becoming a mother.'

" Shri Mahadeva, seeing the devas discomfited, prepared to depart to the northern region of the Himalayas. There, on a peak named Himavatprabhava, he engaged in prolonged yogic practices together with Uma.

" O Rama, I have told thee of one of the two daughters of the Himalayas ; now with Lakshmana, listen to the tale of the other daughter of Himalaya, named Gunga."

CHAPTER 37

The king's elder daughter, Gunga

WHILST Shri Mahadeva was engaged in yogic meditation, the devas, under the leadership of Agni, went to the region of Brahma where, with Indra, they paid reverence to the Lord of the world, and said : " O Lord, at the beginning of creation thou did'st make Shri Mahadeva our leader, but he has now retired to the Himalayas and is engaged in the practice of austerity with Uma. O Thou who art desirous of the good

[1] Karttikeya—The God of War.

of the world, do what thou considerest ought to be done, thou art our only refuge."

Then Shri Brahma encouraged the devas, with gentle words, saying: " O Devas, the curse of Uma Devi, that you should remain without offspring is irrevocable, but the fire god Agni will cause Gunga to bear a son who will destroy the enemies of the gods. The youngest daughter of Himanchala (Uma) will look upon her sister's son as her own and will inevitably lavish her affection on him."

" O Rama, the words of Shri Brahma filled the gods with satisfaction and they offered obeisance to him. Then they all circumambulated Mount Kailasha,[1] the repository of precious metals, and begged Agni to beget a son.

"Agni acquiesced in their request and approaching Shri Gunga, said: ' O Devi, let us beget a son for it is the wish of the gods.'

"Assuming the form of a celestial nymph, Gunga, inspired the fire god to plant his seed in her, her every vein being filled with splendour. After a time, she addressed Agni, saying: ' O Deva, I am unable to bear the ever-increasing splendour which thou hast communicated to me. My body is burning like fire, my mind is agitated and I am filled with fear.'

"Agni replied: ' O Sinless One, place this foetus near the Himalayas.'

" Then Gunga Devi expelled the resplendent being, shining like gold. This substance, falling on the earth, became the purest gold that can be found. All objects in its proximity became silver and the more distant areas exposed to its penetrating rays became copper, the baser parts becoming zinc and lead. In this way, its brilliance was transmuted into metals and spread abroad and the mountains and forests near by were changed to gold. O Rama, gold being produced in that dazzling form is called jatarupa (form-born) and, O Hero, that is why gold shines like fire. The grass, the creepers, the shrubs, all were converted into gold, and from that splendour was born Kumara.

" The devas with Indra engaged the Krittikas[2] to nurse the

[1] Mount Kailasha—said to be the abode of Lord Shiva.
[2] Krittikas—The Pleiades, the six nurses of the God of War.

child and they regarded him as their own son. The gods named the child Karttikeya and said: 'He shall be our son and he will be renowned in the three worlds.'

"The Krittikas bathed the child and as he grew, his form resembled the fire. Because the infant was born prematurely, the devas called him Skanda.

"The nurses began to nourish the child with milk and he shone like a flame. With six mouths he sucked the milk of six nurses at the same time. Soon he grew so powerful that while yet an infant he challenged groups of demons to combat. Then all the gods appointed him their commander-in-chief. The Devas and Agni paid affectionate homage to this child.

"O Rama, this is the inspiring and merit-bestowing story of Shri Gunga and Karttikeya.

"O Raghava, on this earth, those who read this narrative with faith and devotion shall have long lives, sons and grandsons and obtain the divine region of Skanda."

CHAPTER 38

The story of King Sagara, Shri Rama's ancestor

SHRI VISHWAMITRA in gentle accents, related this story to Shri Ramachandra, and then again addressed him, saying :—

"In ancient times there lived a king named Sagara, who ruled in Ayodhya. He was brave and virtuous and a lover of his subjects, yet he was without issue.

"The name of his chief queen was Keshini, a daughter of King Vidharba; she was virtuous and truthful. His second queen was Sumati, a daughter of Arishtanemi and she was comely and charming.

"The king went to the Himalayas and engaged in severe yogic practices in the forest of Bhrigu-prasravana. When he had completed a hundred years' ascetic practices, the ever truthful Maharishi Bhrigu was pleased with him and favoured

him with a boon. He said: 'O Sinless King, thou shalt beget many sons and thy fame will be immeasurable. From one of thy queens shall be born one son, and from the other sixty thousand sons.'

"When the queens heard of the boon granted by the rishi, they approached him saying: 'O Knower of God, we are certain that thy boon will bear fruit, please tell us therefore which of us will beget one son and which sixty thousand?'

"Hearing their words, the highly virtuous Bhrigu said: 'That depends on your desires. Tell me, which of you would fain be the mother of the founder of the dynasty and which desires to beget sixty thousand illustrious sons?'

"O Rama, Queen Keshini desired to be favoured by one son only, but Sumati, the sister of Garuda[1] obtained the boon of bearing sixty thousand powerful and illustrious sons.

"O Prince, the king offered salutations to the Rishi Bhrigu and with his consorts returned to the capital.

"When the time was ripe, the chief Queen Keshini gave birth to a son who was called Asamanjasa.

"O Great One, a gourd was brought forth by Queen Sumati from which, when opened, sixty thousand male infants emerged. The nurses placed them in jars full of butter and tended them. After a long time they attained to the state of adolescence, and then grew to manhood.

"O Rama, the eldest son of King Sagara, Asamanjasa used to seize hold of children and throw them into the river Sarayu. When he saw them drowning, he rejoiced. This evil doer grew up to oppress the good by his conduct.

"The citizens of King Sagara's capital exiled the prince, thus passing judgment on him. Asamanjasa became the father of a valiant prince named Anshuman, who was esteemed by everyone and addressed every man with courtesy.

"After a long time, King Sagara resolved to perform a sacrifice. O Rama, the king summoning the high priests began the initiatory rites."

[1] Garuda—a mythological bird, half man, half bird, the vehicle of Shri Vishnu, and the slayer of serpents. Garuda is said to have stolen the nectar of immortality from the gods, when it was churned from the ocean.

CHAPTER 39

The horse with which he performs a sacrifice is stolen

HAVING listened to this tale, Shri Rama addressed the Muni Vishwamitra, who resembled the fire in splendour, and said: " O Wise One, may prosperity constantly attend thee ! I desire to hear how my ancestor King Sagara performed the sacrifice."

Shri Vishwamitra, highly gratified by Shri Rama's eager enquiry, smilingly replied: " Listen, O Rama, to the history of the high-souled King Sagara. There is a country between the Himalayas and the Vindhya mountains, and it was there that King Sagara performed his sacrifice. That land is suitable for this purpose, O Great Prince.

" The great archer and warrior Anshuman was appointed the protector of the horse released for the sacrifice. A rakshasa in disguise, stole the horse and when it was being borne away, the priests approached the king, crying: ' See, someone is carrying off the horse, kill the thief and restore it.' The king called for his sixty thousand sons and said: 'A wicked demon has stolen the sacrificial steed, in what direction has he borne it away? It has been consecrated by mantrams to avoid obstructions ; seek the horse, my sons, and may success attend you. Scour the earth surrounded by the seas, and excavate the earth at my command, till the sacred horse is found. Having taken the initiation, I cannot leave this place. Go Ye, My Sons ! I shall remain here with Anshuman and the brahmins.'

" O Rama, commanded by their father, those powerful princes joyfully started in search of the horse. O Great One ! they ranged the world in vain and began to dig the ground with their nails which were as sharp as diamonds.

" O Prince of the House of Raghu, they used ploughs, spades and other implements to excavate the ground and the earth shook with the sound. While ploughing up the earth, many snakes, demons and powerful titans were slain and injured.

" O Raghava, those mighty princes pierced the earth to the depth of sixty thousand miles and reached the antipodes. Having

pierced the earth with its mountains, they searched for the horse in Jambudwipa.[1]

"The devas, gandharvas, asuras and nagas became agitated, and approached Shri Brahma; bowing before him with their minds afflicted and in great distress, they said: 'O Blessed Lord, the sons of the Maharajah Sagara are digging up the whole earth and they have brought about the death of many great beings. Whosoever opposes them is slain with the words, "Thou art a thief, thou hast stolen the sacrificial horse"'."

CHAPTER 40

The king's sons search for the horse; they accuse Shri Kapila of stealing it and are reduced to ashes

"THE grandsire Shri Brahma, hearing the words of the gods regarding the sons of King Sagara, who were already doomed, said:—

"'O Devas, this whole world belongs to the glorious Vasudeva[2] and he, in the form of the Sage Kapila, supports it. These princes will fall victims to the wrath of holy Kapila; the earth is eternal and cannot be destroyed.' The gods, hearing these words, returned to their own regions, full of joy.

"Meanwhile, the uproar caused by the sons of Sagara digging the earth resembled the crash of thunder.

"Having encompassed the whole world, they returned to their father and said: 'We have traversed the whole world and have slain gods, demons and snakes, but we have found no trace of the sacrificial horse nor of the thief. O Father, may prosperity attend thee, be pleased to reflect on the matter and give us further instructions.'

"The great monarch replied in anger: 'Go, dig the earth once more, capture the horse, accomplish your purpose, then return.'

[1] Jambudwipa—one of the seven continents of which the world was made up.
[2] Vasudeva—a name of Vishnu.

"In accordance with the command of their royal sire, the princes once more renewed their tunnelling and came upon the monstrous form of a great elephant which resembled a mountain.

"O Prince of Raghu, the whole earth and the mountains of that quarter are supported by that elephant Vimpaksha, and whenever, from fatigue, he moves his feet to ease himself, the whole world trembles and quakes.

"The princes bowed down to him and circumambulated him. They then continued digging deeper and deeper, first to the east, then to the west. To the south they saw the second great elephant whose name was Mahapadma. They beheld him supporting that quarter of the earth and were astonished; they offered him salutations.

"O Prince, the sons of King Sagara next dug the northern quarter of the earth and saw there a white elephant which resembled a heap of snow. His name was Hima-Pandara and his form was gigantic; they worshipped him as he stood supporting that quarter of the earth.

"Then with furious zeal, those mighty and valiant sons of Sagara dug the earth and proceeded to that renowned quarter where they saw Kapila the eternal Lord Vasudeva and the horse grazing near him.

"O Rama, they were glad, thinking that it was Shri Kapila who had stolen the horse. Full of wrath, seizing ploughs, trees, rocks and stones, they ran towards him, crying: 'Thou art the stealer of the sacrificial horse, thou art the thief. O Wicked One, we, the sons of King Sagara, have found thee.'

"O Rama, Shri Kapila, hearing these words, filled with rage, uttered the sound 'H'm' and instantly by his immeasurable power all the sons of Sagara were reduced to ashes."

CHAPTER 41

King Sagara's grandson, Anshuman, finds the horse and the ashes of his uncles. He is told the funeral rites must be performed with the waters of the holy river Gunga

" O Ramachandra, perceiving that a long period had elapsed since the departure of his sons, King Sagara spoke to his powerful and resplendent grandson Anshuman :

" ' O Child, thou art valiant, learned and illustrious like thine ancestors, go and seek thine uncles and the stealer of the horse also. The interior of the earth is inhabited by the most mighty beings, arm thyself therefore with sword, bow and arrows. Pay reverence to those worthy to be worshipped whom thou dost encounter on the way and make obeisance to them ; slay those who obstruct thy purpose, then successful, return and ensure the completion of the sacrifice.'

" Thus instructed by his grandfather, Prince Anshuman, arming himself with sword, bow and arrows, speedily departed. Honoured on the way by devas, danavas, asuras and nagas, pisachas, birds and serpents, he came to the mighty and resplendent elephant and worshipped him, enquiring as to his welfare. The elephant said in reply : ' O Prince Anshuman, thou wilt accomplish thy purpose and soon return to the capital.'

" The prince proceeded further and enquired in the same manner of each of the other great elephants. They all advised the prince, who had paid due respect to them, to proceed further. As instructed by them, Anshuman came to the place where the heaped ashes of his uncles' bodies were lying. Overcome with grief, Anshuman wept to see that death had overtaken them. Afflicted with distress and pain, he suddenly perceived the sacrificial horse grazing near by. Desirous of offering the rite of water for his departed relatives, he looked round but could find no water anywhere. Extending his gaze, he saw his maternal uncle, the holy eagle, who addressed the prince as follows :—

" ' O Lion among men, grieve not, these princes have met the death they deserved. They have been consumed to ashes

by the Mahatma Kapila of unimaginable glory. O Wise One, it is not meet to offer the usual rites for them. O Great One, perform the rites with the water of the holy river Gunga, the Daughter of Himalaya. When the waters of the purifier of the world, the sacred Gunga flow over their ashes, the ceremony will be crowned with success and the sixty thousand princes will be received into heaven '."

The illustrious and mighty Prince Anshuman listened to the words of Shri Garuda and speedily returning with the horse, approached King Sagara, who still awaited the completion of the initiatory rites; he related to him all that the eagle had said. The monarch completed the sacrifice and returned to his capital considering the means whereby he might cause Shri Gunga to descend to earth; but in vain.

King Sagara, unable to devise any way to accomplish this matter, having ruled for thirty thousand years, departed hence.

CHAPTER 42

Anshuman's son, Dilipa, fails and his son Bhagiratha performs austerities to induce the holy river to descend

AFTER his death, the ministers installed the virtuous Anshuman as king. O Rama, glorious was the reign of King Anshuman. He was succeeded by his son, the world-renowned Dilipa.

King Anshuman, leaving his kingdom to Dilipa, retired to the top of a Himalayan peak and began to perform severe yogic austerities. Having passed thirty-two thousand years in this wise, without inducing the sacred river Gunga to descend on earth, he gave up his life.

Acquainted with the fate of his great uncles, and overcome with grief, the mighty sovereign Dilipa found no means of bringing the sacred stream down to earth. Consumed with anxiety, he reflected daily on how he should accomplish the descent of the Gunga and perform the funeral rites for the deliverance of the souls of his ancestors. The righteous and

illustrious King Dilipa, constantly engaged in these reflections, was then blessed with the birth of a virtuous son, Bhagiratha.

The renowned monarch Dilipa observing many sacrifices, ruled over his kingdom for thirty thousand years ; his thoughts were ever devoted to the deliverance of the souls of his forbears until stricken with disease, he was claimed by death. Having bequeathed the kingdom to his son Bhagiratha, his spirit ascended to the region of Indra.

O Rama, Bhagiratha was a virtuous and royal sage, but he had no heir and was desirous of obtaining a son. O Raghava, he entrusted the administration of his kingdom to his ministers and proceeded to the holy place named Gokarna where he practised yogic penances to attract the descent of the holy Gunga. With arms uplifted and senses controlled, he stood in the midst of five fires in the hottest season, partaking of food once a month only, and continued thus for a thousand years.

O Mighty Prince, after a thousand years, Shri Brahma, the Lord and Ruler of the world, was pleased with Bhagiratha and, accompanied by the devas, approached the high-souled king and said :

" O Bhagiratha, thy virtuous yogic practices have elicited our admiration ; ask for a boon, O Fortunate One."

The highly resplendent Bhagiratha, with joined palms submissively addressed Shri Brahma, saying : " O Blessed Lord, if thou art pleased to confer the fruits of mine austerities on me and grant me a boon, then allow me to deliver the souls of the sons of King Sagara by offering them water at their funeral rites, from the sacred stream. O Lord, do thou also grant as a further boon that the Dynasty of Ikshwaku may be preserved and I may have an heir."

The Grandsire of the whole world listened to the prayer of the Maharajah Bhagiratha and answered him in gentle and pleasing accents :—

" O Mighty King Bhagiratha, thou hast asked a great boon, may success attend thee ! Let thy desire for a son be fulfilled. O King, when the Gunga, the eldest daughter of Himalaya falls on the earth with overwhelming power, the earth will not be

able to sustain her; none but the Lord Shiva can accomplish this."

Having uttered these words to King Bhagiratha and having spoken to Shri Gunga also, Shri Brahma returned with the gods to his own region.

CHAPTER 43

Lord Shiva lets loose the sacred river which follows King Bhagiratha's celestial chariot

SHRI BRAHMA having departed, the King Bhagiratha, standing on the tip of one toe, adored Shri Shiva for a full year. O Mighty One, with arms uplifted, living on air, unsupported, fixed like a pillar, day and night King Bhagiratha offered his adorations to the Lord.

A full year having passed, the Lord of Uma, Shri Mahadeva, who is adored by the whole world, spoke to King Bhagiratha as follows: "O Great One, I am pleased with thee, I will accomplish what thou desirest, I will receive the descent of Gunga on my head."

Then the holy Gunga, the eldest daughter of Himalaya, the object of reverence to the whole world, assuming the form of a mighty river, descended with torrential force on to the head of Shiva. The goddess reflected within herself that she would bear down the Lord Mahadeva to the antipodes. Shri Shiva, reading her thoughts, grew angry and determined to detain the mighty stream in his hair. Resembling the majestic Himalayas, the locks of Shri Shiva held the falling Gunga fast and the sacred river remained imprisoned there. For innumerable years the Gunga wandered round and round in the locks of Shri Mahadeva and could not find an egress.

O Rama, when Shri Bhagiratha did not see the holy stream descending to earth, he again began his penance in order to propitiate the Lord of the world.

Then Shri Shiva let loose the Gunga in the Brindusara lake

and as it fell it divided itself into seven streams. The three branches conferring prosperity, Hladini, Pavani and Nalini, flowed towards the east from the head of holy Shiva.

Then the sacred Gunga of pure and delightful water was divided into three further branches, Suchakshu, Sita and Sindhav, all flowing towards the west. The seventh of these streams followed the chariot of the Maharajah Bhagiratha.

The royal sage, riding in a beautiful chariot, went forward and the sacred river Gunga followed him.

Thus did the holy river descend from heaven on to the forehead of Shri Mahadeva and from thence came to the surface of the earth.

The fall of the sacred stream created a mighty reverberation, her waters flowing through beautiful ways. Riding their aerial chariots as large as cities, containing elephants and horses, the gods, sages, celestial musicians, yakshas and siddhas in great numbers, came to witness the holy Ganges falling from heaven to earth. In their aerial chariots named Pariplava, the gods came to see this wonderful event of the holy river flowing on the earth, and as they descended from the skies, the splendour of their celestial ornaments irradiated the cloudless canopy of heaven as if a thousand suns had risen there.

The mercurial fishes and aquatic creatures leaping from the stream thrown up by the force of the current, shone like lightning in the sky, whilst the foam and spray scattered on all sides resembled flocks of swans in flight or clouds in winter.

The waters of the holy Gunga sometimes rose high in the air, sometimes flowed tortuously, sometimes broadened out, sometimes dashed against the rocks and sometimes spouted upwards afterwards falling to the ground; that pure water capable of removing sin looked delightful flowing on the surface of the earth.

Then the celestial sages and heavenly musicians and the denizens of the earth, reverently touched that sacred stream falling from the locks of Shiva.

Those beings, who through a curse, had fallen from the heavenly regions and been made to dwell on earth, were cleansed of their transgressions by bathing in the holy Gunga. Purified and freed from their sins, those resplendent beings returned to the heavenly regions, passing through the sky.

Wherever the sacred Ganges flowed, people were cleansed of their sins by bathing in its waters.

King Bhagiratha, riding a celestial chariot, drove on and Shri Gunga followed after him.

O Rama, the gods, the sages, rakshasas, asuras, yakshas, the chief serpents and nymphs following King Bhagiratha, together with the aquatic beings and swans, attended the sacred river. Whichever course King Bhagiratha took, that mighty river Gunga, the Destroyer of all sin, followed. Flowing on and on, Shri Gunga arrived where the Sage Jahnu, worker of miracles, was performing a sacrifice. Then the sacred river swept over the sacrificial pavilion and all it contained. The Rishi Jahnu perceiving the pride of Gungaji, grew angry and drank up the whole of the water of that river, verily a great miracle !

The devas, gandharvas and sages were astonished and began to worship that Mahatma Jahnu, saying, " From to-day the holy river shall be called thy daughter ". The mighty Jahnu being pleased, let loose the river through his ears. From thence Shri Gunga is called Jahnavi (the daughter of Jahnu). Thereafter she once again flowed behind the chariot of King Bhagiratha. Finally, the holy Gunga reached the sea and entered the lower regions to fulfil the purpose of the king.

The royal Sage Bhagiratha attended by the sacred river, gazed with grief on the ashes of his ancestors. O Prince of the House of Raghu, as soon as the holy stream touched the ashes, the sons of King Sagara were resuscitated, freed from sin, and attained the celestial region.

CHAPTER 44

King Bhagiratha completes the funeral rites for his ancestors

When the king attended by the holy Gunga, reached the seashore, he entered the subterranean region where the sons of King Sagara had been burnt to ashes.

"O Rama, as the holy water flowed over the ashes, Shri Brahma the Lord of all the worlds, addressed King Bhagiratha as follows: 'O Great King, thou hast redeemed the sixty thousand sons of King Sagara, who now dwell in the heavenly region. O King, as long as the waters of the sea continue on earth, so long shall the sons of King Sagara in celestial form enjoy heaven. Henceforth, O Great Sovereign, Shri Gunga shall be thy eldest daughter and be known by thy name throughout the earth. This sacred river shall be named Shri Gunga, Tripathaga[1] and Bhagirathi.

"'O King, perform the funeral rites of thine ancestors and fulfil thy prescribed duty. The mighty King Sagara was not able to accomplish this purpose and King Anshuman of limitless prowess also failed to obtain the fulfilment of his devout desire. Thy father Dilipa, equal to ourselves in merit and a warrior fully established in the duties of his caste, that illustrious Dilipa besought the holy Gunga to descend to earth in vain. This great design has been accomplished by thee alone. Thou hast acquired undying renown throughout the world.

"'By achieving this, thou art possessed of the highest dharma. O Great Sovereign, now do thou bathe in the holy stream also. O Lion among men, purify thyself and acquire merit, then perform the funeral rites of thine ancestors. O King, may prosperity attend thee, return to thy capital, I shall now ascend to my own abode.'

"The mighty and illustrious Brahma then ascended to heaven and the royal Sage Bhagiratha, having performed the obsequies of the sons of King Sagara, with the water of the sacred Ganges, returned to his capital.

"Enjoying every felicity, King Bhagiratha began to govern once more and his people rejoiced that he had again assumed rulership. All were freed from suffering and anxiety and they increased in wealth and prosperity.

"O Rama, I have narrated the story of the descent of Shri Gunga fully to thee. May prosperity attend thee! Dusk has fallen and the hour of the evening prayer has come. This story gives wealth, prosperity, fame, longevity, sons, and residence

[1] Tripathaga—three way going.

in heaven to the reader. He who causes it to be heard by others whether he be a brahmin or a kshatriya, brings joy to his ancestors and the gods.

" O Ramachandra, he who with fixed attention listens to this story, shall obtain all he desires, his sins will be remitted and he will obtain long life and renown."

CHAPTER 45

Vishwamitra begins to relate the story of the city of Vishala and the churning of the ocean, which leads to the combat between the devas and the daityas

SHRI RAMACHANDRA and Shri Lakshmana were filled with astonishment on hearing the words of Shri Vishwamitra, and said to him: " O Holy Sage, marvellous indeed is the history of King Sagara and the descent of the Ganges, which thou hast related to us."

The night drew on as they had been listening to the story, and Shri Rama and Lakshmana passed the remaining hours meditating on the matter.

The clear day dawned and Shri Rama, having performed his daily devotions, said to Shri Vishwamitra: " The night has passed in listening to this divine narrative, it has slipped away, as if it were a moment. Now let us cross the sacred and merit-giving stream reflecting on its marvellous origin. Knowing thee to have come, the other sages have sent a boat in preparation for crossing the holy river."

Shri Vishwamitra summoned the ferryman and with the princes and sages all were conveyed to the other side. They rested awhile on the opposite bank and entertained the sages in their company. In the distance, they saw the city named Vishala and soon the great Rishi Vishwamitra with the princes reached that place of beauty, which resembled one of Indra's cities.

Then Rama, full of wisdom, approached the holy sage and

humbly made enquiry concerning the city. He said: "O Great Sage, what royal and illustrious house rules here? I desire to hear."

At these words of Rama, the holy sage began to relate the story of the city as follows :—

"O Rama, attend! I will tell thee the story of this city, which I heard from Indra.

"In the golden age (Satya Yuga) Diti[1] gave birth to a powerful son Daitya, an asura, and Aditi[1] gave birth to the highly fortunate and exceedingly righteous son Devata, a celestial being. These two sagacious beings sought to become immortal, incorruptible and free from disease, old age and other ills. After reflecting on this matter, they resolved to churn Kshiroda (the ocean of milk) and obtain from it the water of immortality. Using the mighty snake Vasuki as a rope and the Mandara mountain as the churn, they began to churn the ocean. When they had done so for a thousand years, the snake Vasuki bit the rocks with its teeth and threw up venom. From this was produced the great poison which began to consume men, gods, demons and the whole world.

"The gods took refuge with the Lord Shiva and worshipped him crying 'Protect us, protect us'. Attracted by the mournful cry of the gods, Shri Mahadeva and Shri Hari[3] appeared there with conch and disc.

"Shri Vishnu[3] smilingly addressed the bearer of the trident, Shri Mahadeva, and said: 'O Lord, thou art the chief of the gods and should'st, therefore, accept whatever is first produced by the churning of the ocean. Receive the poison as thy gift, the first tribute.'

"Having spoken thus, Shri Vishnu disappeared, and the Blessed Lord Shiva, moved by the distress of the gods and the words of Shri Vishnu, drank the dreadful poison, as if it were nectar, and returned to Kailasha.

"O Prince of Raghu, the devas and the daityas began churning once more, but the churning staff began to sink. Then the devas and gandharvas praised the Lord Vishnu, saying: 'O

[1] Diti—a goddess, mother of the titans, daityas.
[2] Aditi—a goddess, denoting "infinity", mother of the gods, adityas.
[3] Shri Hari—another title of the Lord Vishnu.

Blessed Lord, Thou art the Master of all beings, thou art the asylum of the gods—protect us all, O Great Lord, and support the sinking Mandara mountain.'

" Shri Vishnu, assuming the form of a tortoise, entered the ocean and supported the mountain on his back. Taking hold of the peak in his hand, the blessed Vishnu churned the ocean, standing between the devas and the asuras.

"After a thousand years, Shri Dhanwantari,[1] the teacher of the Ayur Veda appeared, holding a staff and loshta in his hands; thereafter many nymphs emerged. O Raghava, they were called apsaras, 'ap' meaning water and 'yara' to 'emerge from'; on this account these beautiful damsels were named 'apsaras.' O Rama, they numbered six hundred million and their female attendants were innumerable. None were received either by the devas or the daityas, hence they remained without a lord.

" Then, O Prince, Varuni,[2] the daughter of the god Varuna[2] was born. The sons of Aditi did not accept her, but the asuras gladly did so. Those who rejected her were called suras[3] (devas) and those who received her became merry and were called asuras.

" O Raghava, then the celestial horse Uchchaihshravas and the jewel Kaustubha also rose out of the sea, and they were succeeded by the water of immortality.

" O Rama, the devas fought with the danavas[4] for possession of the nectar and the daityas allied themselves with the asuras in this struggle; terrible indeed was this combat.

"After many had lost their lives in the fight, Shri Vishnu assumed the form of Mohini, a charming woman the product of Maya[5] and stole the nectar from the combatants.

" Those who opposed the imperishable Vishnu were destroyed by him. In this conflict the gods slew countless daityas.[6] Indra, after slaying the asuras, became the king of the devas and with the help of the sages began to rule with joy."

[1] Dhanwantari—physician of the gods.
[2] Varuni—literally " wine ", the daughter of Varuna, the Lord of waters.
[3] Suras—another name for the gods.
[4] Danavas—Giants who warred against the gods.
[5] Maya—the indescribable, indefinable principle or power by which all creatures are deluded. (For further explanation refer to glossary.)
[6] Daityas—Titans.

CHAPTER 46

Diti undergoes severe austerities for the birth of a son

"O RAMA, learning that her children had been slain, Diti was much afflicted and approached her husband Kasyapa[1] with the words: 'O Lord, by thy powerful sons, am I bereft of my children. I desire a son who will be able to destroy Indra, though to this end I must undergo great penance. Such austerities I will perform, if thou wilt grant me a son that is mighty, valorous, strong-willed and firm of purpose.'

"The holy sage answered the afflicted Diti saying: 'Be it so! Remain chaste for a thousand years, thou shalt then bear a son capable of destroying Indra. By my grace, thy child shall be the ruler of the three worlds.'

"Thus did the sage console Diti, and blessing her, departed to practise penance. Diti retired contentedly to the forest of Kushaplava and began to undergo severe austerities.

"Indra then, coming there, paid reverence to her and began to serve her with humility, supplying her with fire, kusha grass[2] and other necessities, massaging her body when she became weak from the severity of ascetic practices. O Rama, Indra served Diti for a thousand years less ten days.

"Then Diti joyfully addressed Indra saying: 'O Indra, thy father has promised to grant me a son after a thousand years penance. Thou shalt soon behold thy brother, whom I desire shall overcome thee. With him thou shalt share the three worlds and be happy, have no anxiety.'

"By this time the afternoon had come. Diti overcome with sleep, placing her feet where her head had lain, carelessly assumed an impure posture.

"Indra rejoiced and laughed aloud. Entering her body, he cut the foetus into seven pieces with his great mace. Diti's slumber was interrupted by the cry of the child in her womb.

[1] Kasyapa—a Vedic sage.
[2] Kusha grass—sacred grass used in religious ceremonies, a grass of long stalks and pointed leaves. (Desnostachya bipinnata.)

Indra said to it 'Do not weep', 'Do not weep', and again divided the child with his mace, despite Diti's cries, 'Do not destroy it, do not destroy it'.

"Then Indra paused in his murderous assault and with extreme humility addressed Diti saying 'O Diti, thou wast impure through sleeping with thy feet towards the head of the couch, thou did'st thus occupy an improper posture. I have, therefore, severed thine unborn child into seven parts, since he was to be the cause of my destruction. O Devi, pardon me'."

CHAPTER 47

The holy sage and the princes arrive at Vishala and are welcomed by King Pramati

KNOWING the foetus to be divided into seven parts, Diti was greatly perturbed and said to Indra :—

"Through my fault has this come to pass; O Indra, thou art in no wise guilty. This child being divided, for thy good and mine own, I declare that these seven shall become the protectors of the forty-nine winds. These seven sons of divine appearance shall be known as the Bala-kanda winds. Let one wander about in the region of Brahma, another in the region of Indra, and the third in space. Let the remaining four winds go anywhere under thy instructions; may they all be known by the name of Maruts, conferred on them by thee."

With joined palms, the thousand-eyed god Indra said in reply to Diti: "O Devi, it will assuredly come to pass as thou desireth. Thy sons shall wander about in the form of devas in the Tapovana forest."

Thus reconciled and fully satisfied the mother and son ascended to heaven.

Thus have I heard, O Rama! This is that Tapovana forest in which Indra formerly served his mother Diti. O Lion among Men, here a great city was founded by the righteous Prince Vishala, the son of King Ikswaku and Alambusa.

O Rama, the mighty son of Vishala was named Hemachandra, and his son was the renowned Suchandra. O Rama, the son of Suchandra was Dhumrashwa and his son was Srinjaya. The glorious Sahadeva was the son of Srinjaya and the son of Sahadeva was the highly virtuous Krishashwa.

The son of Krishashwa was Somadatta and his son was Kakustha. The most illustrious and invincible of warriors King Pramati the son of Kakustha, is the present ruler of Vishala.

By the grace of King Ikswaku all the rulers of Vishala are long lived, virtuous and mighty.

O Rama, let us pass the night here, and to-morrow we will wait upon King Janaka.

When the powerful King Pramati heard of Shri Vishwamitra's arrival in his kingdom, he went with his spiritual preceptor and relatives to welcome him.

With joined palms, they offered him due worship and enquired as to his welfare. The king said: "O Muni, to-day I am indeed fortunate that thou hast been gracious enough to visit my kingdom. None is more blessed than I."

CHAPTER 48

They come to Gautama's hermitage and Vishwamitra relates its story

King Pramati having enquired as to the well-being of Shri Vishwamitra, said:—

"O Holy Sage, may the Lord protect those two youths; be gracious enough to tell me who they may be. These princes, equal to the gods in power, walking with the gait of an elephant, fearless as lions or bulls in combat, whose eyes resemble lotuses, who are armed with swords, bows and quivers, who rival the heavenly Aswins[1] in beauty and who, in the flower of their

[1] Aswins—celestial horsemen, twin sons of Surya, the sun, precursors of the dawn.

youth, appear like gods, visiting the earth. Why are they travelling on foot? Whose sons are they? Why are they come? Enhancing the earth as the sun and moon illumine the sky; their manner of address and bearing showing them to be kinsmen, why are these two heroes of high descent, bearing mighty weapons, found on this hard path? I long to hear."

Shri Vishwamitra related to the king the whole story of the visit to the Siddha Ashrama and the slaying of the asuras.

The king was highly gratified to meet the princes, and perceiving them to be virtuous, entertained them with the greatest respect. Shri Ramachandra and Lakshmana having received hospitality from King Pramati, passed the night there. The following day they left for Mithilapuri, the capital of King Janaka.

When they beheld the city at a distance, they cried out: "How beautiful, how beautiful it is!" Thereafter, finding a charming hermitage which was uninhabited, Rama enquired of the Rishi Vishwamitra as follows: "O Sage, how can it be that this beautiful hermitage is unfrequented? O Lord, tell us whose has been this hermitage?"

Shri Vishwamitra, chief among the eloquent, answered Rama, saying: "O Prince, hear the true story of this hermitage, I will relate to thee who was its author and how he cursed it in anger.

"O Rama, this place, a source of wonder even to the gods, belonged to the Rishi Gautama and resembled the abode of the celestials. Here with Ahalya, the sage practised Yoga for thousands of years.

"O Rama, one day, the sage having gone to a distant place, Indra, finding Ahalya alone, assumed his form, and said to her: 'O Fair One, I am overcome by desire, let us carry out our conjugal duty.'

"O Raghava, though Ahalya recognized Indra disguised as her lord, yet she acceded to his request. Then Ahalya addressed Indra saying: 'O Indra, I am highly gratified, now depart quickly, unobserved. O Chief of the gods, preserve me and thyself from Gautama.'

"Indra laughed and answered: 'O Thou of beautiful waist,

to-day I rejoice, I will now depart for my own region.' On this, he sought to leave the hut of Ahalya.

" O Rama, at that instant he observed the Rishi Gautama entering the hut and he became agitated and anxious. Seeing the holy sage unconquered by devas or danavas, endowed with the power of Yoga, drenched with holy water, shining like fire, holding the sacred fuel and kusha grass in his hands, Indra was terrified and grew pale.

" Shri Gautama perceiving Indra in his own guise and judging by his guilty looks that he was leaving his spouse having committed sin with her, cursed him saying :—

" ' O Wicked Wretch, assuming my form, thou hast committed this sinful act. Be thou impotent.' Cursed by the Rishi Gautama, Indra was instantly deprived of his manhood. Then the Sage Gautama cursed Ahalya also saying : ' Thou shalt remain immovable in this place for thousands of years, thy food the wind alone. Thou shalt be as dust, invisible to all creatures. When Rama, the son of Dasaratha visits this forest, then shalt thou be cleansed from thy sin. Having served him, O Deluded One without desire for personal gain, thou shalt be restored to me in thy present body.'

" Thus did the illustrious Gautama curse the wicked Ahalya and, abandoning the hermitage, began his yogic penances, on the beautiful peak of Himalaya, inhabited by siddhas."

CHAPTER 49

Shri Rama liberates Ahalya from Gautama's curse and departs for Mithila

Deprived of his virility, Indra grew melancholy, and addressing Agni and the other gods, said : " By obstructing the ascetic practices of the Mahatma Gautama, who sought to usurp my power, I have verily served the purpose of the gods. Evoking his wrath, by causing him to curse me and denounce Ahalya,

I have robbed the rishi of his spiritual power, therefore, O Devas, O Divine Beings, help me now to recover my manhood."

Then the gods with Agni at their head, approached the pittris, kavyavahanas and other beings and said to them : " Indra has been deprived of his virility ; this ram of yours is in full possession of its powers, allow us to graft the testicles of the ram on to Indra, we can compensate the ram in this wise—from to-day, let those who desire to propitiate you, offer the sacrifice of a castrated ram and receive the reward of great merit at your hands."

The pittris did as requested by Agni and grafted the testicles of the ram on to Indra. From that time, O Rama, they have accepted the sacrifice of a gelded ram.

This event proves the immeasurable power of the practices of the holy sage. Now let us enter his hermitage. O Rama, do thou liberate the unfortunate Ahalya, so that she may once more resume her nymph-like form."

Shri Rama accepted the command and entered the hermitage, preceded by the Sage Vishwamitra. There they beheld Ahalya, by virtue of her yogic practices. Unperceived by devas, asuras or men, it seemed as if Brahma had created her with his own hands as a great mistress of occult powers. Resembling the full moon veiled in mist or the reflection of the sun in water or a bright fire wreathed in smoke, by the curse of the Rishi Gautama she remained invisible and thus it was ordained she should remain till she beheld Shri Ramachandra and till that hour, none in the three worlds should look on her.

With the deepest reverence did Shri Rama and Lakshmana touch the feet of Ahalya and she, remembering the words of the Rishi Gautama fell down in devotion before them. Thereafter, she entertained them with due hospitality, as enjoined in the scriptures, while the two princes acknowledged the honour paid to them. At this moment a rain of flowers fell from the sky, scattered by the gods ; heavenly musicians sang and celestial nymphs danced whilst all rejoiced and paid homage to Ahalya.

The illustrious Sage Gautama becoming aware of the matter through his divine powers, repaired to the hermitage and rejoiced to behold Ahalya restored to her former state. Re-united, they

both worshipped the glorious Rama and then resumed their spiritual life together.

Shri Rama, having accepted the homage offered to him, departed thence for Mithila.

CHAPTER 50

They are welcomed at the place of sacrifice by King Janaka

PRECEDED by Shri Vishwamitra, Shri Rama and Lakshmana came to the king's place of sacrifice. Beholding the sacrificial pavilion, they said to the holy sage: " How well has the great Janaka prepared for the sacrifice! O August Rishi, thousands of brahmins learned in the Vedas, from many lands, with hundreds of bullock carts transporting their possessions, can be seen here. O Holy Father, let us choose a place where thou mayest rest."

The Sage thereupon selected a place which was secluded and supplied with water.

Hearing of the arrival of Shri Vishwamitra, King Janaka, accompanied by his illustrious priest, Shri Shatananda, and many others, hastened to that place and humbly offered obeisance to the holy sage. Then the king placed the traditional gifts of water sweetened with honey[1] before him and he, accepting the gifts, enquired as to the king's welfare and further whether the sacrifice was proceeding without hindrance; he then duly inquired concerning the welfare of Shri Shatananda and other holy men in attendance on their sovereign.

The king received all with a cheerful countenance and with joined palms said to Shri Vishwamitra: " O August Lord, please be seated with the other great sages." Thus requested, they sat down, after which Janaka with his family priest, brahmins and counsellors occupied their places, the king seated in the midst of his ministers.

[1] Madhuparka—a mixture of curds, butter, honey and the milk of coconut—a traditional offering.

Having attended to the due placing of his guests, the illustrious sovereign said: "O Lord, to-day, by the grace of the gods, all the preparations for the sacrifice have been carried out, now by thine advent here I have acquired merit equal to the fruit of my sacrifice. Blessed am I that thou hast honoured the place of sacrifice with thy presence. O Divine Sage, the high priests have informed me that the sacrifice will be completed in the course of twelve days, the gods will then come to take their share; Thou, O Illustrious Lord, shalt behold them."

Having thus addressed the sage, the king again earnestly enquired of him, saying: "May prosperity attend thee! O Sage, who are these two illustrious princes, equalling the gods in power, whose bearing resembles the majesty of an elephant, or a lion, who are valiant and whose eyes are like lotuses, who are armed with swords, bows and quivers and whose beauty rivals the Aswini-Kumara, who are youthful and appear to have descended from heaven to earth like the gods? Have they come here on foot? Whose sons are they? They, whose eyes are wide set and who are armed with sacred weapons, who wear their hair like Karttikeya[1] and who captivate the hearts of men by their magnanimous and virtuous qualities? Surely they are come hither to exalt our hearts and add to the fame of our dynasty? Adorning the earth as the sun or moon adorn the sky, in stature and bearing resembling each other, O Great Sage, whose sons are they? Please tell me all!"

Hearing the words of King Janaka, Shri Vishwamitra said: "These are the sons of King Dasaratha."

He then told the king of their residence in the Siddha-Asrama and of the slaying of the demons, of their visit to Vishala and the rescue of Ahalya, also of their meeting with the Sage Gautama. Then he said: "Now have we come to see the great bow."

Having related all this to the king, the great muni became silent.

[1] Kartfikeya—the god of war; the hair was shaved on the crown and the two side pieces like crows' wings left at the side.

BALA KANDA

CHAPTER 51

Gautama's son, Shatananda, relates more of the story of the Sage Vishwamitra

HAVING heard the words of the wise Vishwamitra, Shri Shatananda, the eldest son of the Sage Gautama, resplendent by virtue of his practice of Yoga, was filled with wonder and delight and, beholding Shri Rama was astonished.

Seeing the two princes sitting at their ease, Shri Shatananda said to the Sage Vishwamitra : " O Holy Sage, was my mother, so long involved in the practice of austerity, shown by thee to Shri Ramachandra ? O Illustrious One, did my mother entertain these two heroes worthy of adoration with fruits and those things she was able to obtain in the hermitage ?

" O Holy Rishi, didst thou relate the story of the improper behaviour of Indra to my mother in bygone days, to Shri Ramachandra ? O Holy One, by virtue of the advent of Shri Rama, did my mother obtain my father's favour once more ? O Kaushika, did my father duly honour Shri Ramachandra and is this Illustrious One, having received the hospitality of my parents, really come hither ? O Holy Sage, please tell me ; when my tranquil-minded sire entered the hermitage, was he honoured by Shri Rama ? "

Shri Vishwamitra, skilled in the art of converse and acquainted with the laws of rhetoric, answered Shri Shatananda saying :—

" O Great Muni, I did that which should be done, by speaking that which was proper to the occasion, and patiently listening to that which was spoken, recollecting my duty. As Jamadagni, who first cursed Renuka and was then reconciled to her, so has thy father shown favour to thy mother and received her again."

Hearing the words of Shri Vishwamitra, the great Shatananda addressed Shri Ramachandra, saying : " O Great One, may thy coming be the source of prosperity to all. It is fortunate indeed that thou didst visit my father's hermitage and restore my mother to her former state. How can I sufficiently praise that mighty Sage Shri Vishwamitra, reverenced by all the sages. O Rama, enlightened are his actions ; by virtue of his

holy practices he has become a brahmarishi[1] though previously a royal sage. Among brahmarishis he is unique, he is known to me as one who is ever concerned with the good of all. O Rama, none is equal to thee on earth, since thou art protected by so great a sage as Vishwamitra. Hear while I relate the story of the great Kaushika[2] to thee :—

" In the past, this holy sage was a virtuous monarch, versed in all branches of learning, delighting in the welfare of his subjects and the destroyer of his foes.

" Kusha, the righteous and powerful king, was the son of Prajapati, and his son was Gadhi, and the great and illustrious Sage Vishwamitra is the son of Gadhi.

" On ascending the throne, King Vishwamitra ruled the earth for many thousands of years. At a certain time, King Vishwamitra, assembling his army, set out to range the earth. O Rama, he passed through many cities and kingdoms and crossed innumerable rivers, mountains and forests, visiting many hermitages till he came to the one belonging to Shri Vasishtha. This hermitage was thickly planted with many-branched trees with dense foliage in which birds of every kind dwelt. Many species of beasts frequented that place, and the siddhas also came there—devas, gandharvas and other celestial beings added to the peace and beauty of that hermitage by their presence. Beautiful birds flew about and peaceful deer wandered here and there. Many learned brahmins also dwelt in that hermitage.

" Brahmin sages and also celestial rishis inhabited that place, so that it shone like fire by virtue of their presence. This hermitage sheltered many great Vedic scholars equal to Brahma, some living only on air, some on water, some on dry leaves. Other sages lived on fruit and roots, and there were in addition thousands of brahmacharis fully self-subdued.

" Each sage observed the sacred traditions, performing his morning and evening devotions, repeating the silent prayer (japa) offering water to the spirits of his ancestors, and pouring oblations into the sacrificial fire.

[1] Brahmarishi—There are four kinds of sages or rishis : The Rajarishi or royal sage, the Maharishi or great sage, the Brahmarishi or sacred sage and the Devarishi or divine sage. The ascending scale culminates in the Devarishi.

[2] Kaushika—The name of Vishwamitra, he being the son of King Kusika, or Kusha.

" Many retired householders practising Yoga, dwelt there with their wives. Verily that hermitage resembled the abode of Brahma, and the great and powerful King Vishwamitra rejoiced to behold it."

CHAPTER 52

How King Vishwamitra visits Shri Vasishtha's hermitage and accepts hospitality provided by the wish-fulfilling cow, Shabala

BEHOLDING the hermitage, the mighty Vishwamitra filled with joy, bowed with great humility to Shri Vasishtha who was engaged in the telling of his rosary.

Shri Vasishtha welcomed the king and bade him be seated, and he having done so was offered the fruits and roots that grew in that place.

Honoured by the holy sage, King Vishwamitra enquired of him if all were well with the fire sacrifice, his spiritual practices and his disciples. Shri Vasishtha related to him all that concerned his welfare and the welfare of those in the hermitage, even to the trees themselves.

Sitting at ease, Shri Vasishtha said to King Vishwamitra, eminent among yogis and a son of Shri Brahma himself: " O King, is it well with thee in all ways ? Dost thou give satisfaction to thy subjects in accordance with the law of righteousness and dost thou rule and protect thy people according to the spiritual law ? Is thy revenue justly received and increased ? Is it judiciously administered and distributed to those who are eligible and deserving ? Are thy servants remunerated at the proper season ? Do thy subjects willingly obey thee ? O Sovereign, hast thou subdued thine enemies ? O Sinless King, is it well with thine army, thy treasury, thy friends, thy sons and grandsons ? "

In reply to these questions, King Vishwamitra humbly answered: "All is well, my Lord ! "

Conversing pleasantly together for a long time, recounting

the ancient traditions to each other, they thus promoted their mutual delight.

O Prince of the House of Raghu, when King Vishwamitra paused, Shri Vasishtha said to him smilingly: "O King, although thou hast with thee a large retinue, yet it is my desire to offer thee hospitality, together with thine army. Be pleased to accept it. Since thou art a distinguished guest, it is meet that I should do all within my power to entertain thee, therefore, be gracious enough to receive the little I have to offer."

King Vishwamitra answered: "O Lord, thy gentle and pleasing words are sufficient entertainment. Moreover, thou hast already presented me with fruits and the clear water of thy hermitage. By meeting with thee alone, am I sufficiently honoured. O Supremely Wise One, it was proper that I should offer obeisance to thee; now thou hast entertained me, allow me to offer thee salutations and depart."

The great sage declined to accept the king's refusal of his offer, and still insisted that he should entertain him.

Then Vishwamitra said: "Be it according to thy pleasure, my Lord, I will do as thou desirest."

At these words, Shri Vasishtha sent for his favourite spotted cow Kamadhenu and said to her: "O Shabala, draw near and listen to me, I desire to offer hospitality to the king and his army. O Dear One, thou art the wish-fulfilling cow and can accomplish anything, therefore, now prepare splendid dishes which will be pleasing to them, of the six kinds of taste.[1] Produce speedily whatever food can be eaten, drunk, licked or sucked."

CHAPTER 53

The king desires to possess Shabala but Shri Vasishtha will not give her up

THE cow Shabala provided for the needs of all according to the instruction of Shri Vasishtha. Sugar cane, sweets of various kinds, honey, crushed barley, wine and other excellent drinks,

[1] The six kinds of taste: sweet, bitter, acid, salt, pungent and acrid.

hot rice in heaps as high as mountains, milk, curry and other fare combining the six tastes and countless other dishes with sweets made of jagari[1] were distributed. Each was wholly satisfied and delighted with the hospitality of Shri Vasishtha, who accorded to all the companions and retainers of King Vishwamitra the full extent of their desires.

The king with his family priests, ministers and attendants, partaking of the feast offered with generosity and respect by the great sage, was highly gratified.

When all the counsellors and personal attendants and the army had received full hospitality, the king, wholly satisfied, said to Shri Vasishtha: " O Holy Sage, thou hast entertained me royally, please hear what I have to say O Eloquent One! O Lord, give me the cow Shabala in exchange for a hundred thousand excellent cows. Shabala is a jewel and by a king should jewels be enjoyed—according to the natural law, this treasure should therefore be mine."

Shri Vasishtha answered, saying: " O King, I will not part with Shabala in exchange for ten million cows, still less for a hundred thousand. If thou did'st offer me mountains of silver yet would I refuse to give thee Shabala for she must remain in my hermitage.

" O King, as a righteous man cares for his good name, so do I for Shabala. She helps me to satisfy the devas, the pittris and other beings. My sacred fire sacrifice and other Vedic rites, besides the various branches of learning depend on Shabala. O Great Ruler, indeed I cannot relinquish this cow, she is my all and she fulfils all my needs—for these and numerous other reasons do I refuse to yield the cow to thee. O King, verily I will not part with Shabala."

The words of Shri Vasishtha merely increased the king's desire and he, under great emotion, declared with passion: " O Great Muni, I will give thee fourteen thousand elephants adorned with golden trappings, ornaments and goads and, in addition, I will give thee a hundred and eight chariots made of solid gold, each driven by four milk white horses. At the same time, I offer thee eleven thousand well-trained horses, each with a golden harness and further ten million cows of

[1] Jagari—coarse brown Indian sugar made from palm sap.

varied colours, that are young and healthy. O give me Shabala, and I will give thee in exchange as much gold as thou desirest. Grant me Shabala, I implore thee, and accept my gifts, O Sage."

Then the wise Vasishtha said: "Under no condition can I part with Shabala, O King, she is my jewel and my wealth. She is my very life, my all-in-all, and she furnishes me with alms and all I require for sacrifice. In brief, O King, Shabala is the source of my spiritual life and I will never give her up."

CHAPTER 54

King Vishwamitra attempts to carry her away by force

O Rama, perceiving that Shri Vasishtha would not willingly consent to part with the cow, Vishwamitra resolved to carry her away by force.

O Raghava, while Shabala was being forcibly carried off, distracted with grief, she began to reflect thus: "Why has the holy Vasishtha abandoned me? In what way have I offended the holy sage? Why are the servants of the king dragging me away from the hermitage? I am innocent and docile, the holy muni is dear to me; what fault have I committed that the Mahatma Vasishtha should abandon me?"

Sighing again and again, Shabala, shaking off the hands of the king's attendants, swiftly ran and placed her head at the feet of the holy sage. Standing before Shri Vasishtha, shedding tears and lamenting loudly, she cried: "O Lord, O Son of Brahma hast thou verily abandoned me? Why are the servants of the king taking me away from thy presence, by force?"

Seeing the sorely stricken Shabala, Shri Vasishtha addressed her as he would his own sister, saying: "O Shabala, it is not by my will that thou art thus being carried away, neither hast thou offended me in any way, O Dear One. Drunk with desire, the king is taking thee from me by force. I have not the power to defend thee. The king is a warrior and lord of the earth, he is attended by a mighty army with horses, elephants and chariots, verily he is mightier than I."

Shabala, who was skilled in argument, listened to the words of Shri Vasishtha and said: "O Holy Sage, the power of a warrior is as nought compared to that of a holy sage. O Illustrious Lord, the strength of a sage is divine and based on the exercise of spiritual practices and discipline, it is therefore limitless; thou art, O Lord, immeasurably stronger than a kshatriya. The power of that mighty king Vishwamitra, is great, but he cannot equal thy strength and splendour. O Lord, through thy strength and energy suffer me to destroy the power and pride of this wicked wretch."

Shri Vasishtha answered: "Be it so! Create an army by thy spiritual energy, that will destroy the forces of the king."

Lowing loudly, Shabala, in obedience to the sage, instantly produced hundreds of foreign soldiers, who began to destroy the army of Vishwamitra while he was looking on. Perceiving his army about to be overthrown, King Vishwamitra became enraged and, mounting his chariot, his eyes red with anger, he advanced to the attack. With various weapons, he began to slay thousands of men, and Shabala, seeing the army created by her, annihilated, now produced strange beings called shakas in such numbers, that they filled the whole earth. Highly valorous, their skins shining like gold, clad in yellow armour, furnished with scimitars and maces, they started to consume the army of Vishwamitra like a raging fire.

Then the great Vishwamitra, with the aid of yogic weapons, began to create disorder in the ranks of the forces produced by Shabala.

CHAPTER 55

Shabala creates an army which annihilates Vishwamitra's forces

As the mighty warriors fell, pierced by the weapons of Vishwamitra's forces, Shri Vasishtha said to Shabala: "O Shabala, create more warriors by the power of Yoga."

Shabala, lowing loudly, produced well-armed soldiers from her feet and udders, and from her hair and thighs were born the extraordinary warriors Harita and Kirata. By these, the whole army of Vishwamitra consisting of elephants, horses and chariots, was instantly destroyed. Beholding their entire army exterminated by the power of Shri Vasishtha, King Vishwamitra's hundred sons bearing mighty arms and with various thought-propelled weapons rushed angrily at the holy Sage Vasishtha. Shri Vasishtha merely uttered the sound " H'm ! " and they were all immediately consumed. By the great Sage Vasishtha, the infantry, cavalry and chariots, together with the sons of King Vishwamitra, were instantly burned to ashes.

Then the illustrious monarch Vishwamitra whose sons and army had been annihilated, was filled with shame and dismay. Deprived of his glory, he resembled a waveless ocean or a snake bereft of its fangs or the sun under eclipse. Like a bird without wings, his confidence shattered, his pride humbled, he became filled with anxiety. Bestowing the kingdom on his only remaining son, he exhorted him to rule according to dharma and then himself retired to the forest to practise asceticism.

After some time, he found favour with Shri Mahadeva[1] the magnanimous granter of boons, and he, appearing before Vishwamitra, addressed him saying : " O King, why art thou undergoing penance ? What is thy desire ? I will grant thee whatsoever thou asketh ? "

Shri Vishwamitra making obeisance to Shri Mahadeva said to him : " O Great God, if I have found favour with thee, then instruct me in the Upanishads and other branches of learning, teach me also the mysteries and the science of archery. Whatever weapons are known to the danavas, yakshas, asuras and other beings, let them be revealed to me by thy grace."

On hearing the request of the king, Shri Shiva answered, " Be it so " and returned to his abode.

King Vishwamitra, having acquired the various weapons from Mahadeva, became as happy as the sea at the time of the full moon. He now resolved to subdue the Sage Vasishtha and regarded him as his captive already.

Proceeding to his hermitage he discharged his great weapons

[1] Mahadeva—Great God, a name of Shiva.

like rain, setting the forest of Tapovan ablaze. Afflicted by these dreadful weapons, all the sages began to flee to the four quarters in terror; even the disciples of Shri Vasishtha, together with innumerable birds and beasts, escaped hastily in every direction. The hermitage of Shri Vasishtha became deserted and a deep silence fell upon it, causing it to resemble a barren field.

Shri Vasishtha repeatedly called out: " Fear not, fear not, I will destroy Vishwamitra as the sun dispels the morning mist."

Then the great Sage Vasishtha, foremost among those who practise silent prayer, angrily addressed Vishwamitra saying: " Thou hast destroyed my ancient and auspicious hermitage, O Wicked and Deluded Wretch, thou thyself shalt be destroyed."

Snatching up his staff equal to the rod of Yama, he advanced like a naked flame.

CHAPTER 56

Shri Vasishtha by his spiritual strength conquers Vishwamitra who then engages in penances

HEARING the harsh words uttered by Shri Vasishtha, Vishwamitra raising the fire weapon, cried: " Stay! Beware! "

Then Shri Vasishtha, lifting up his Brahma staff in wrath, exclaimed: " O Vilest of Warriors, here I stand, let loose all thy weapons, not excepting those propelled by thought which thou hast obtained from the Lord Shiva. O Son of Gadhi, to-day I will deprive thee of all these weapons. How can thy power as a warrior compare with that of a divine sage? O Stupid Wretch, behold my divine energy! "

So saying, Shri Vasishtha quenched the dangerous fire weapon hurled at him by Vishwamitra as water quenches fire.

Then the son of Gadhi let fly other dangerous weapons upon the holy sage, the Varuna, the Rudra, the Indra, the Pashupata and Ishika weapons together with the Manava, Mohana, Gandharva, Swapana, Jrimbhana, Viadana, Santapana,

and Vilapana; the Shoshana, Darana and the terrible Vatra; the Brahma-pasha and Kalapasha, the Varuna-pasha and the priceless Pinaka and also the missiles Shushka and Ardra, the Danda weapon and the Pisacha, the Krouncha and the Dharma-discus, the Kala discus and the discus of Vishnu, also the weapon Vayuvya, Mathana and Haya-shira did he discharge upon the great sage with the two Shaktis, the Kankala, Mushala, Vidyadhara, Kala, the trident Kapala and the Kankana. All these did he hurl at the holy sage.

Then Shri Vasishtha accomplished a great marvel and by means of his staff alone destroyed all the weapons of Vishwamitra. Seeing these weapons rendered ineffectual, Vishwamitra raised the Brahman-astra. At this, Agni, the divine sages and the celestial beings were seized with terror and the three worlds shook with fear. But by means of his spiritual power and the study and practice of Brahman-Vidya, Shri Vasishtha subdued the Brahman-astra. As Shri Vasishtha consumed this tremendous weapon, his charming and pleasing mien became terrible and from each pore of his body shafts of light shot forth while the staff of the holy sage, shining like fire, burst into flame.

All the sages now began to praise Shri Vasishtha, saying: "Thy power is without equal and ever productive of good, by the power of thy Yoga, pacify the Brahman-astra. O Holy Sage, thou hast humbled the pride of Vishwamitra. O Great Ascetic, be pacified, that we also may be delivered from fear."

Thus addressed, Shri Vasishtha assumed his accustomed mien and Vishwamitra, being defeated, sighing heavily, exclaimed: "Woe, woe to the might of a warrior! The real power is the spiritual power. Shri Vasishtha by his spiritual strength has fully conquered mine. I will, therefore, abandon my warlike nature and seek to obtain brahmanhood."

CHAPTER 57

Shri Vasishtha refuses to help King Trishanku enter heaven in his physical state

THE heart of Vishwamitra was heavy, remembering his disgrace, and he was filled with remorse at having borne enmity to Shri Vasishtha.

O Rama, with his queen he went to the southern quarter and began his great ascetic penance there.

After a long time four sons were born to him, each a devotee of truth, who were virtuous and of great military prowess. Their names were Havisyanda, Madhusyanda, Drirha-netra and Maharatha.

Having practised severe austerities for a thousand years, the Grandsire of the world, Shri Brahma appeared before Vishwamitra and said: " O Son of Kaushika, thou hast surpassed the royal sages in thy great asceticism, thou shalt, therefore, be numbered among them." Having thus spoken, Shri Brahma with the gods went to Brahmaloka.

Vishwamitra was filled with shame and with bowed head, overcome with grief, thus spoke: "Alas! In spite of prolonged austerities, the gods still hold me to be a royal sage.[1] I deem this state no reward for the penance I have undergone."

O Rama, with renewed resolve, Vishwamitra, pre-eminent in the field of endeavour began his life of mortification anew.

At this time, the great King Trishanku of the House of Ikswaku, fully self-subdued and a lover of truth, resolved to initiate a sacrifice in order to enter heaven in his physical body. Summoning the holy Sage Vasishtha, he communicated his intention to him, but the Mahatma Vasishtha, having duly considered the matter, said: " O King, this cannot be."

Discouraged by Shri Vasishtha and for the purpose of fulfilling his design, the monarch went southwards to where the sons of Shri Vasishtha abode, leading lives of purity and ascetism. When King Trishanku beheld the sons of his own Guru, that great and illustrious sage, he was full of shame, and with bowed

[1] See note on page 102.

head offered salutation to them, addressing them in great humility saying, " O Protectors of those who seek refuge in you, I come to seek your aid. O Holy Ones, I besought your sire to assist me in the observance of a sacrifice and he discouraged me. I have, therefore, come to seek your help in the matter. O Sons of my Holy Guru, I offer salutations to you. Again and again, I bow down to you, O Holy Ones, and beseech you to officiate at the proposed sacrifice, which I desire to undertake for the fulfilment of my design, namely that I may ascend to heaven in my embodied state. Discouraged by the holy teacher Vasishtha, I consider that you alone are able to assist me. Should you refuse me, there is none in whom I may take refuge. The kings of the House of Ikshwaku have always sought guidance of their spiritual preceptor in time of need, and the holy and learned Sage Vasishtha has ever upheld the dynasty and, following him, you alone are my instructors ".

CHAPTER 58

The king appeals to Shri Vasishtha's sons to conduct the sacrifice. They curse him and he appeals to Vishwamitra

O RAMA, hearing the words of the king, the hundred sons of Shri Vasishtha were filled with wrath and said: " O Thou Evil-minded Wretch, discouraged by thy spiritual preceptor, how dost thou dare to seek our aid? O King, we know thee to be an ignorant man. Shri Vasishtha is able to advance the sacrifices of the three worlds, verily thou art no true disciple of such a sage. Shall we render void the utterance of our great sire? "

Hearing these harsh words, the king replied: " Discouraged by my Guru and now by you, I shall seek elsewhere for aid; may all be well with you."

The sons of the great sage were enraged on hearing these words spoken in defiance, and cursed the king, saying: " Mayest

thou become one of the fallen caste." Having thus cursed him, they returned to their hermitage.

When the night was over, the king was transformed into a low-born being, his complexion dark, his body emaciated, his head shaven, his whole frame besmeared with ashes from the crematorium, his golden ornaments changed to lead.

When the people of the capital beheld the king in this condition they fled from that place, and Trishanku departed, full of anguish. Sunk in grief day and night, he finally sought refuge with Shri Vishwamitra. That sage seeing the monarch deprived of his kingdom and condemned to assume the form of a low-caste being, was moved with compassion, and addressed him saying: "O Mighty Prince, mayest thou be prosperous! Why hast thou come hither? I know thee to be the Sovereign of Ayodhya that through a curse art come to this state."

The eloquent King Trishanku, with joined palms, replied in tones of submission: "O Great One, discouraged by my Guru and his sons in my desire to enter heaven in the physical body, I have been transformed by them into a chandala.[1] Now, for shame, I may not show myself to any. O Lord, I have failed to obtain the fruit of countless sacrifices, an untruth has never been uttered by me, I have governed my people with righteousness and by my conduct have satisfied my spiritual preceptor and holy men. I desired to undertake a further meritorious sacrifice, but O Great Sage, my Guru has withheld his aid. O Lord, destiny is irrevocable, destiny is inexorable, none can withstand it. All are ruled by destiny. O Divine Sage, be favourable to me, who am fallen into distress! Besides thee, there is none in whom I can take refuge. O Holy One, by thy spiritual energy, avert this evil fate."

[1] Chandala—an outcast.

CHAPTER 59

Vishwamitra seeks the help of the sons of Vasishtha and Mahodeva ; they refuse and are cursed

SHRI VISHWAMITRA heard the appeal of the fallen sovereign and in sweet accents spoke words of comfort, saying: "O King, thou art welcome, I know thee to be wholly virtuous, I will be thy refuge, fear not. I shall invite hither the learned and pious brahmans who will assist thee in the performance of thy sacrifice. This thou shalt accomplish and obtain heaven in the form imposed on thee by thy Guru. O King, having taken refuge in me, consider thy purpose already accomplished."

Having uttered these words, Shri Vishwamitra commanded his sons to prepare all things for the sacrifice. Summoning his disciples, he said to them: "Bring hither the pious and learned brahmins and the sons of Shri Vasishtha also. May they come with their disciples, their friends, the learned and the priests. If any disregard my word, let it be reported to me."

In obedience to the sage, the disciples set out to every quarter, summoning the sages and learned men from many lands. Returning, they approached Vishwamitra, and said: "O Lord, at thy command the holy sages are coming hither, some are already come, Mahodeva excepted; but the sons of holy Vasishtha, transported with rage uttered harsh words of which we will tell thee." They said: "How shall divine sages partake of that sacrifice undertaken by a chandala, at which a kshatriya officiates? And how shall those brahmins, constrained by Vishwamitra, partaking of the food offered by a chandala, enter heaven?"

O Great Sage, these are the words of the sons of Shri Vasishtha.

Vishwamitra, his eyes red with anger, answered: "Why should the sons of Shri Vasishtha disregard me, who am engaged in severe ascetic practices and without guilt? By my power, these evil-minded men shall this day be consumed to ashes and enter the abode of death. By my curse they shall become

of those who subsist on the dead for a hundred incarnations. They shall eat the flesh of dogs and be called 'Musthika'. Despised by all, they shall wander about among men and may the wicked Mahodeva also, having imputed blame to me, be born as a fowler, for a long time becoming the pitiless destroyer of other's lives and by my wrath may he sink to a miserable and abject state."

Sitting amid the sages, the Sage Vishwamitra having pronounced this curse, became silent.

CHAPTER 60

Through fear of Vishwamitra, the sages assist in the sacrifice and King Trishanku ascends to a specially created heaven

HAVING stricken the sons of Shri Vasishtha by the power of his asceticism, Vishwamitra, seated amidst the sages, spoke :—

"The renowned monarch Trishanku of the dynasty of Ikshwaku, who is both magnanimous and virtuous, has taken refuge with me. He is desirous of entering heaven in his embodied state, it is for me to accomplish it. O Sages, do you unitedly assist him in this sacrifice."

The sages hearing the words of Vishwamitra and being acquainted with the tradition, consulted together saying : "The son of Kaushika, the Rishi Vishwamitra, is given to wrath. If we do not fulfil his desire, like a consuming fire he will pour out his curse upon us. Let us, therefore, assist him in the sacrifice so that the king may enter heaven in his physical body. Now let us inaugurate the rites."

Then the rites began, as prescribed by ancient tradition, Vishwamitra acting as the chief priest and the learned brahmins becoming the sacrificing priests subordinate to him. Observing numerous rituals, the sacrifice continued for a long time. Then Shri Vishwamitra called thither the gods for their share of the sacrifice, but none of these celestial beings appeared. At this

the great sage grew exceedingly wroth and lifting up the sacrificial vessel, said to the King Trishanku : " O King, behold the power of my asceticism by virtue of which I now send thee to heaven *in thy embodied state. O King, though it is deemed impossible* to accomplish this, by the power acquired by me I now say to thee ; ' ascend to heaven in thy physical form.' "

Having uttered these words, King Trishanku, in the presence of the sages instantly ascended to the heavens.

Seeing Trishanku there, Indra and all the other gods exclaimed : " O Trishanku, thou hast no place in heaven. Cursed by thy Guru, O Stupid Wretch, do thou fall headlong to the earth."

Trishanku accordingly instantly began to fall towards the earth crying out to Shri Vishwamitra, " Protect me ", " Protect me ".

Shri Vishwamitra, hearing the cry, grew angry, and called out, " Stay, Stay ". At that moment, standing amidst the sages, the great rishi resembled Prajapati. Thereafter he created seven planets in the southern quarter called the Seven Rishis, and then he created the Ashwini and twenty-seven other stars. Seated amidst the sages, filled with wrath, Vishwamitra reflected in himself : " I will create another Indra or I will leave this heaven without an Indra. Nay, I will make Trishanku Lord of this heaven," and he began to create a new circle of gods.

Upon this, the sages, gods and celestial beings, bewildered and perturbed, approached Vishwamitra and said with humility : " O Great Sage, this king has been cursed by his spiritual preceptor and is not worthy of heaven."

Shri Vishwamitra answered them, saying : " Hear, O ye Gods, I have vowed that this king should enter heaven in his embodied state, this pledge must be fulfilled. To this end, I have created the Pole star and other planets and this heaven will abide as long as the former heaven endures, as also the gods created by me, it becomes you, therefore, to confirm what I have promised."

The gods in awe, having heard these words, answered : " Be it so, O Illustrious Rishi, the heaven created by thee shall endure beyond the Path of Vishwanara, and let Trishanku, suspended head downwards, remain as if immortal among these shining

stars. As the stars attend on famous and successful men, so let these brilliant luminaries, created by thee, attend on King Trishanku."

Shri Vishwamitra, extolled by the gods, acquiesced in their proposal.

After this, O Rama, the gods and the ascetics who had attended the sacrifice, returned to their own regions.

CHAPTER 61

King Ambarisha's sacrificial horse is lost and he seeks a human victim

O Rama, when Vishwamitra saw the sages departing, he said to the dwellers of the Tapovana forest: "In the southern region, great obstructions have hindered my penances, I shall therefore go to another quarter to perform austerity. To the west of this place, at the sacred spot named Pushkara, there is a large and beautiful forest where I shall continue my practices undisturbed."

Reaching that place, the great sage engaging in occult practices, subsisted on fruit and roots.

Meanwhile, King Ambarisha of Ayodhya inaugurated the horse sacrifice, but the horse was carried away by Indra, on which the priest addressed the monarch, saying: "O King, it is for thee to protect the sacrificial steed, the horse has been stolen away owing to thy negligence, therefore, provide another or seek a human victim, so that the sacrifice may be accomplished without further hindrance."

Hearing these words, the renowned monarch offered thousands of cows to whosoever should find either a horse, or human being. Seeking the sacrificial beast, the illustrious sovereign passed through many countries, cities and forests, and entered hermitages and sacred places.

At length, the King Ambarisha beheld Richika the Sage, with his sons and wife dwelling on the mountain Bhrigutunga.

Making obeisance to him, the king honoured him in various ways and enquired as to his welfare. He then said to him: "If it be agreeable to thee, grant me one of thy sons in exchange for a hundred thousand cows. After searching many countries, I have not found either a horse or a human victim for the sacrifice. O Lord, do thou, therefore, deliver thy son to me and accede to my request."

Richika answered: "O King, I will never bestow my eldest son on any." His wife then said: "My Lord does not wish to part with the eldest son, but the youngest son Shunaka is dearest to me, I shall not part with him. O Great Muni, the eldest son is beloved of his father and the youngest is dear to his mother, therefore, these two should not be taken away."

O Rama, the middle son, whose name was Shunashepha, hearing these words, spoke thus: "My father does not wish to part with his eldest son, nor my mother with her youngest, therefore, take me, O King."

O Rama, the king gave the Sage Richika a hundred thousand cows in exchange for Shunashepha and, mounting his chariot, started with him on his homeward journey.

CHAPTER 62

Shunashepha, the human victim, seeks and obtains help from Vishwamitra

O Rama, the illustrious King Ambarisha, accompanied by Shunashepha, having in the afternoon reached Pushkara, rested there. While the king rested, Shunashepha, going to a certain spot, beheld Shri Vishwamitra, his maternal uncle, engaged with other sages in the performance of spiritual practices and he, sorrowful, thirsty and fatigued, fell at the feet of the sage, and said: "O Lord, for me there is neither father, mother, relative nor caste. O Peaceful Sage, O Sovereign among ascetics, I take refuge in thee; in the name of dharma, deliver me. Thou can'st protect the whole world, how much more one so insignifi-

cant as myself. *Do thou assist the king in the completion of his sacrifice that it may be accomplished without hindrance,* and may I live and by means of my spiritual practices obtain heaven. Thou art my master who am masterless. Protect me, wretched as I am, as a father protects his child."

Shri Vishwamitra, hearing the piteous words of Shunashepha addressed his own sons, saying: "O My Sons, that world for which fathers beget their children is at hand,[1] this child is the son of the Sage Richika and has taken refuge in me, let us protect his life. You are all virtuous and charitable, let one of you take the place of the sacrificial victim at the king's sacrifice, and thus satisfy the God Agni. In this way, we can rescue Shunashepha. Assist me in the completion of the king's sacrifice, propitiate the gods, and enable me to be true to my word."

Hearing these words, Madhusyanda and the other sons sullenly replied to Vishwamitra, saying: "O King of Kings, would'st thou abandon thine own sons and protect another's? Such an action resembles the relinquishing of a tasty dish to partake of the flesh of a dog."

Hearing this reply, Shri Vishwamitra grew angry and, his eyes inflamed with wrath, he said: "Your speech is arrogant and contrary to dharma, it is a violation of filial affection. I regard you all as insubordinate, therefore, I now curse you. Like the sons of Shri Vasishtha, may you fall from your high caste and, eating the flesh of dogs, wander about in the world during the period of a thousand years!"

Having thus cursed his sons, the muni, offering Shunashepha his protection, thus instructed him: "O Son of a Sage, at King Ambarisha's sacrifice, allow thyself to be bound, adorned with the red garland, besmeared with sandalwood paste and tied to the sacrificial post. I will impart to thee two mantrams, which when repeated, will deliver thee."

The holy sage then carefully instructed him in the sacred formulas. Thereafter, Shunashepha approached the king and said: "O Illustrious Monarch, now enter upon the initiation without delay and accomplish the performance of thy sacrifice."

[1] The Hindus regard their hope of a future existence to depend to a great extent on their sons performing their obsequies.

The king, filled with joy, went without delay to the sacrificial pavilion. With the consent of the officiating priest, the king now dressed Shunashepha in red attire and tied him to the post as the consecrated victim. Being bound, Shunashepha began to praise Upendra[1] by reciting the mantrams he had been given by Vishwamitra.

Indra, pleased with the worship of Shunashepha, bestowed the blessing of long life on him.

O Rama, then did the king complete his sacrifice and obtain the desired fruit from Indra.

Thereafter, the righteous Vishwamitra renewed his yogic penance in Pushkara and performed it there for a thousand years.

CHAPTER 63

After more austerities Vishwamitra is proclaimed a Maharishi

SHRI VISHWAMITRA passed a thousand years in the practice of mortification, then the gods came to bestow on him the fruits of his asceticism. The supreme Brahma addressed him in pleasing accents, saying: " O Holy One, mayest thou be prosperous, thou art now become a rishi by virtue of thy great austerities." Having said this, Shri Brahma and the other celestial beings returned to their own spheres.

Vishwamitra again engaged in severe austerity and in this way passed many more years. While thus employed, the celestial nymph Menaka came to bathe in the Pushkara lake. Resembling lightning illumining a cloud, her beauty stirred the passion of Vishwamitra and he said to her :—

" Be gracious to me for I am filled with a great love for thee."

Then that beautiful one agreed to take up her abode in the hermitage of the rishi. The penances of Vishwamitra were thus rendered void by the presence of Menaka in the hermitage. O Rama, that nymph passed ten years in that place.

[1] Upendra—a name of Indra.

After this time, Shri Vishwamitra perceiving himself to have been deluded, was filled with shame and he reflected on the cause of his infatuation. Then he adjudged the gods to have devised this plan to bring his ascetism to nought and he cried out: " What, have I passed ten years with this woman, as it were a night. Alas! My great austerities are destroyed by this passion."

Sighing heavily and filled with remorse, he beheld Menaka trembling with fear, standing near, but Vishwamitra addressing her in reassuring words, bade her farewell.

Having controlled his passions, Shri Vishwamitra went to the northern mountains and began to perform penance in the Himalayas on the bank of the Kaushiki river.

Then, O Rama, the gods were filled with fear by the austerities practised by the rishi on the Himalayan mountains, and approaching Shri Brahma said:—

" O Grandsire, now grant the title of maharishi to Shri Vishwamitra."

Shri Brahma then appeared before Vishwamitra and in gentle accents said to him: " Hail to Thee, O Rishi, I am pleased with thine austerity. I name thee chief among the rishis."

Then Vishwamitra, making obeisance to Shri Brahma, spoke submissively saying: " O Lord, these penances have been undertaken by me that I might become a brahmarishi. Since thou still namest me maharishi, I regard myself as not yet fully self-subdued."

Shri Brahma answered, saying: " So it is, thou hast not yet fully gained the mastery over thy senses. O Great Muni, undergo further penance." Having uttered these words, Shri Brahma returned to the celestial regions.

Then Vishwamitra began an exceedingly severe penance, standing unsupported with his arms raised, living only on air; in the summer season, standing in the midst of five fires, in the rainy season lying without a canopy, in the winter practising his spiritual discipline in water, thus did he pass a thousand years.

Perceiving Vishwamitra undergoing these severe penances, the gods were greatly perturbed. At length their lord, Indra,

approached the nymph Rambha and begged her to promote his interest and cause harm to Vishwamitra.

CHAPTER 64

Indra is perturbed and sends Rambha to disturb the further austerities of the Sage

INDRA thus addressed Rambha saying: " O Rambha, it is for thee to accomplish this great work and stimulate the passions of the great Sage Vishwamitra, so that his spiritual practices may be rendered void."

O Rama, Rambha, filled with apprehension on hearing the words of Indra, said in humility: " O Indra, the Rishi Vishwamitra is easily moved to wrath, he will certainly curse me if I approach him. I fear to enter his presence, do not therefore ask me to undertake this task."

To Rambha, trembling with fear, standing with joined palms, in token of submission, Indra made answer: " O Rambha, fear not, accomplish my desire, may success attend thee!

In the spring season, assuming the form of a cuckoo calling sweetly, accompanied by the god of love, I will take my place on a blossoming tree not far from thee. O Rambha, attired in beautiful and charming apparel do thou divert the mind of the muni from his spiritual practices."

At the instance of Indra, that lovely nymph clad in enchanting raiment, faintly smiling, went forth to allure the heart of Shri Vishwamitra.

At that moment, the liquid notes of the cuckoo began to delight the rishi and he then beheld the nymph Rambha. Stirred by the cuckoo's note and the ravishing sound of the beautiful Rambha's song, Shri Vishwamitra, recollecting his former fall, was filled with misgiving and recognizing the design of the god Indra, transported with rage, cursed Rambha, saying:—

" O Rambha, O Unfortunate One, thou hast come hither

to lure me from my penance, I, who have conquered lust and anger. Mayest thou become petrified and take the form of a rock for ten thousand years. A brahmin perfected in the power of Yoga shall one day deliver thee from this curse."

Having pronounced this curse on Rambha, the rishi became a prey to remorse, for, giving way to wrath he lost the fruit of all his yogic practices.

Rambha having been instantly turned to stone, Indra and Kama, perceiving the sage filled with wrath, fled in terror.

Shri Vishwamitra having lost the merit of his penances could obtain no peace ; his passions remaining unsubdued, he resolved to speak no word to any and never give way to anger ; he said : " For a thousand years, I will not breathe. Reducing my body to the last extremity, mastering my senses, I will obtain brahmanhood by the power of my penance. Measureless years, shall I remain standing, neither breathing nor eating, even should my limbs become atrophied."

O Rama, Vishwamitra resolved to perform this mortification for the space of a thousand years.

CHAPTER 65

Vishwamitra performs another thousand years' austerities and he acquires brahmanhood

After this the great Rishi Vishwamitra, leaving the northern quarter, went eastward and engaged in a most severe course of austerities. Observing silence for a thousand years, he performed incomparable ascetic practices, hardly able to be accomplished.

After a thousand years, his form reduced to the semblance of wood, the royal sage, under the greatest provocation, was not incited to anger. O Rama, when Vishwamitra was persuaded that he had conquered anger, his vow of a thousand years' mortification being terminated, he sat down to eat.

At that time, Indra appeared in the guise of a brahmin and

requested the food set before the muni, upon which Vishwamitra, believing him to be a sage, gave him the whole which he had prepared for himself and still observing the vow of silence, uttered no word.

The chief of the sages, suspending his breath for a further thousand years, continued his penance, then there issued from his head a smoke which terrified the beings of the three worlds. By the power of his mortification, the devas, gandharvas, and other beings were deprived of their glory and lost consciousness.

In distress, they addressed Shri Brahma saying: "O Lord, by every means in our power, we have sought to distract the great sage from his penances and provoke him to anger, but he has persisted in his practices and is free from desire and aversion. If thou dost not grant him brahmanhood, verily the three worlds will be destroyed. None can find rest anywhere, the seas are drying up and the mountains are riven by the power of his austerities; the sun is deprived of its splendour, the earth is agitated and the wind stirs not. O Lord, we cannot move him from his resolve. On account of this peril, men like atheists have given up the performance of charitable deeds. Nowhere is peace to be found. O Divine Being, lest the mighty Vishwamitra, resplendent as fire, determine to destroy the universe, deign to grant him his desire. As Time, in the form of fire, at the dissolution of the world, consumes the whole universe, so also will the Sage Vishwamitra. Grant him, therefore, Indrahood, if he so desire it, for if Thou withhold brahmanhood which he has sought to acquire, then only the sovereignty of Indra's region, will content him."

Thus approached, Shri Brahma, accompanied by the gods, appeared before Shri Vishwamitra and in pleasing accents addressed him, saying: "O Brahmarishi, reverence to thee, we are pleased with thine austerity. O Holy Vishwamitra, by the power of thy penance, thou hast acquired brahmanhood. The gods bless thee, may prosperity attend thee, may longevity be thine! From to-day, thou art free, now go where thou pleaseth."

Offering salutations to Shri Brahma and all the gods, Shri Vishwamitra said: "Having bestowed brahmanhood and

longevity upon me, grant me instruction in the holy syllable 'AUM' and the Vedas also, and further invest me with the authority to officiate at the sacrifice. O Ye Gods, let the son of Brahma, Shri Vasishtha, fully acquainted with the Vedic science, acknowledge me as a brahmarishi. If this desire of mine be fulfilled, ye may all depart."

Thereupon the gods appeared before Shri Vasishtha, who having acquiesced in their wish and sealed his friendship with Vishwamitra, said to him: "Verily thou art now a brahmarishi and as such I acknowledge thee." Thereafter the gods returned to their own region. Thus did the illustrious Sage Vishwamitra acquire brahmanhood.

The divine sage then paid homage to the great Vasishtha and, his purpose accomplished, wandered about the earth engaged in charitable deeds. Shri Shatananda said: "O Rama, this is the story of Shri Vishwamitra and how he obtained brahmanhood. O Raghava, verily he is the chief of sages and the personification of Yoga. Constantly engaged in acts of virtue, he still performs rigorous penances."

Having uttered these words, Shri Shatananda became silent.

When this excellent sage had ended his narrative, King Janaka in the presence of Rama and Lakshmana humbly addressed Shri Vishwamitra saying: "O Chief of Sages, blessed am I, that thou art come with Shri Rama and Lakshmana to my sacrifice. O Muni, thou hast, by thy presence, done us great honour. O Brahmarishi, thou hast added to our renown. Shri Rama, my counsellors and I have heard the story of thy wonderful austerities and also of thine excellent qualities. O Great Sage, immense is thy power, unimaginable thy penances, incalculable thy virtues, nor does one ever tire of hearing of thy marvellous deeds. O Illustrious Lord, the sun has set and the time of evening devotion is near, graciously grant us leave to depart; in the morning we shall see thee again."

Shri Vishwamitra gratified by the king's words, praised him and granted him permission to depart, upon which King Janaka rose and circumambulating the great sage took his departure, accompanied by his spiritual preceptor and relatives.

Honoured by the sages, the great Vishwamitra with Shri Rama and Lakshmana also returned to his abode.

CHAPTER 66

King Janaka relates the story of the great bow and the birth of Sita

THE day dawned peacefully and King Janaka, having performed his morning devotions, called for the two princes and Vishwamitra. Having honoured the sage and the two descendants of the House of Raghu, he said: " O Blessed Lord, peace be with thee, what service can I render thee, I am wholly thine."

Thus addressed by the king, the Sage replied: " These two princes are the sons of King Dasaratha, they are renowned in the warrior caste and exalted throughout the earth. They desire to see the great bow, which is deposited with thee, be gracious enough to permit them to view it and having thus accomplished their purpose, they will return to their own capital."

Thus addressed, King Janaka replied to the sage: " O Holy Rishi, hear from me for what reason this bow is deposited with me. There was a king named Devarata in the sixth generation of the monarch Nimi who obtained this bow as a trust. In ancient days, Shri Mahadeva at the destruction of Daksha's[1] sacrifice, lifting up his bow in sport said to the gods: ' O Devas, ye have failed to give me my share in the sacrifice, therefore, by means of this bow I shall destroy you all.'

" O Great Sage, the devas overwhelmed with fear, making supplication to the god, succeeded in propitiating Shri Mahadeva. Then he delivered the bow to the gods and they bestowed it on King Devarata. This is the bow.

" Thereafter, while I was ploughing the earth for a sacrifice, a virgin issued therefrom. Being uncovered by the edge of the plough, I named her Sita[2] and she became my daughter. This earth-born virgin has grown up under my protection. For the marriage of my daughter, it was established by me and made known to the kings coming to seek her hand, that I should not bestow her on any prince whose strength had not been fully tried. O Renowned Sage, these kings have come to test

[1] Daksha—the father of Parvati, the son of Brahma, one of the Prajapatis
[2] Sita—literally a furrow.

their prowess and I have placed the bow before them and requested them to string it, but none as yet has been able to do so. Perceiving them to be deficient in strength, I have refused to bestow my daughter on any of them. These kings, inflamed with anger, considering their failure to string the bow had brought them into disrepute, surrounded my capital, and inflicted great hardship on my people. This siege endured a full year and immeasurably reduced my treasury. Undergoing severe penances, I propitiated the gods, who granted me a large army with which I have defeated those kings who have retreated, bereft of courage, yet still smarting under imagined injury.

" O Great Sage, this is that bow and I will show it to these two princes. O Rishi, should Shri Ramachandra be able to string the bow, I will give my daughter Sita to him in marriage."

CHAPTER 67

The illustrious Rama breaks the bow and is given the Princess Sita in marriage

HEARING the words of King Janaka, Shri Vishwamitra said :—

" O King, let the bow be shown to Shri Rama."

Then the monarch addressed his ministers, saying: " Go, bring the bow adorned with flowers and sandalwood, hither."

The counsellors commanded by Janaka went to the capital and brought back the bow. Five hundred men, of great strength, brought the eight-wheeled cart on which the bow was placed. Having brought the chest fashioned of iron containing the bow, the ministers addressed their divine sovereign, saying: " O Chief of Men, here is the bow worshipped by former kings. O Sovereign of Mithila, it is at thy disposal."

Then, with palms joined in humility, King Janaka spoke to the holy Sage Vishwamitra standing with Rama and Lakshmana: " O Holy Lord, this is the bow which has been the object of worship to the kings of the Nimi dynasty and which the monarchs

of the earth coming hither have sought to string. Even the gods have not been able to raise, bend or string this bow. How, therefore, should mortals have the power to do so if the gods have failed? O Great Rishi, behold the bow, let the two princes examine it."

The righteous Sage Vishwamitra, hearing the words of the king, said to Rama: "O Child, view this divine bow." Then Shri Rama, approaching the casket in which the bow lay, opened it and gazed upon it.

He said: "O Divine Lord, taking it in my hand and raising it up, I shall endeavour to string the bow." Then the king and the sage answered: "Be it so," and Shri Ramachandra with a slight effort, seizing the centre of the bow, lifted it up in the presence of thousands of people and without exertion drew it. By the unparalleled strength of the illustrious Rama, the bow broke into two parts and a sound resembling the fall of a thunderbolt rang forth cleaving the mountains asunder and causing the earth to shake, and on this the people on every side fell insensible, save only Vishwamitra, Rama and Lakshmana.

After a while, the people being somewhat restored, and the king's misgivings set at rest, he addressed the excellent Sage with humility, saying: "O Blessed Lord, I have witnessed the unparalleled, wonderful and incontestable feat of Shri Ramachandra. My daughter, the Princess Sita, shall obtain Prince Rama as her lord and add to the glory of my dynasty. O Great Sage, to-day my pledge to subject the prospective wooer of my daughter to a trial of strength has been redeemed. Now I shall bestow on Rama, Sita, who is dearer to me than my life. With thy permission, O Sage, my messengers in swift chariots shall drive in all haste to Ayodhya and respectfully relating this event to King Dasaratha invite him to my capital. They shall further inform him regarding the well-being of the two princes protected by thee and with due honour, convey the great king hither."

The Sage Vishwamitra acquiescing to the proposal, the king communicated the matter to his messengers and entrusting them with a personal missive to King Dasaratha, sent them forth on their deputation.

CHAPTER 68

King Janaka sends messengers to invite King Dasaratha to the capital

COMMANDED by King Janaka, the messengers in swift chariots, passing three nights on the way, their horses greatly fatigued, arrived at Ayodhya. Entering the gates of the palace, they addressed the sentries, saying :—

" Please inform the king that we have come from King Janaka and desire an audience."

King Dasaratha being informed, caused the messengers to be brought before him. Entering the royal palace, they beheld the aged king who resembled a god. His benign and gracious presence putting them at their ease, they addressed him in gentle and submissive accents saying : " O Illustrious Sovereign, the Lord of the kingdom of Mithila, the performer of great sacrifices, King Janaka, enquires with affection as to thy well-being and also concerning the welfare of thy subjects. With the consent of the Sage Vishwamitra he sends you the following good tidings. His daughter who has been wooed by many kings unable to pass the requisite trial of strength, who have thereupon returned home discomfited, has been won by thy highly fortunate and princely son. He, in the company of the Sage Vishwamitra, coming hither, broke the sacred bow in the presence of a great assembly, therefore, King Janaka desiring to see his daughter wedded to thy son, Shri Ramachandra, sends thee the following message : " O Great Sovereign be gracious enough to visit my kingdom with all speed, together with thy preceptors, thy family and attendants and be united with thy sons. Accept the love I bear for thee. Do thou come hither and witness the nuptials of thy children.

" O King, these are the words of King Janaka which we bring to thee approved by the Sage Vishwamitra and the priest Shri Shatananda."

Having uttered these words, the messengers, overawed by the sovereign's presence, became silent.

On receiving these tidings, King Dasaratha full of joy, said

to the holy Sage Vasishtha, Shri Vamadeva and his ministers: "Protected by Shri Vishwamitra, Shri Ramachandra and Prince Lakshmana are now in the city of Mithila. The renowned Janaka has witnessed the prowess of Shri Ramachandra and desires to give his daughter in marriage to him. If this union is looked upon with favour by you, let us start for Mithila immediately, so that we may reach it with all speed."

The sages and ministers there present, answered: "It is well," whereupon the king, highly pleased, said: "Let us set out to-morrow."

King Dasaratha with his counsellors entertained King Janaka's messengers with great respect, and they passed the night there in comfort.

CHAPTER 69

King Dasaratha sets out with his spiritual preceptor, relations and ministers

THE night being over, King Dasaratha, glad in heart, accompanied by his spiritual preceptor and relations, summoned his chief minister, Sumantra, and said:—

"Let the officers of the treasury take with them wealth and jewels in abundance and precede us in good order. Let the four divisions of my army hold themselves in readiness and let chariots and palanquins be prepared. Let my commands be carried out with promptitude. Suffer Shri Vasishtha, Vamadeva, Javali, Kashyapa, Bhrigu, Markandeya and Katyayana with other learned and holy men to lead the procession. Make ready the royal chariot, let there be no delay, King Janaka's messengers are eager to return."

Then the mighty King Dasaratha attended by the holy sages set out on the journey followed by his army. Passing four nights on the road, they entered the capital of King Janaka, who, having commanded the city to be decorated, advanced to pay honour to his royal guests. Approaching the aged

sovereign Dasaratha, King Janaka was filled with joy, and addressed him with cheerful words, saying: "O Great King, I bid thee welcome, fortunate indeed am I that thou hast been gracious enough to honour me with thy presence. Now shalt thou have the felicity of looking on thy two sons. Twice blessed am I that Shri Vasishtha, attended by other learned sages, has come hither also, as it were Indra in the midst of the gods. Every impediment to the wedding ceremony has been withdrawn and this ancient dynasty, by the alliance with the House of Raghu, will acquire new lustre. O Illustrious Sovereign, to-morrow at the completion of the sacrifice, having consulted with the sages, be gracious enough to celebrate the nuptials."

The eloquent monarch, Dasaratha, seated amidst the sages, answered: "I have ever heard that those who receive charity are subject to the conferrer of that charity! O Thou acquainted with virtue, it is ours to defer to thee in all things."

Hearing the speech of the truthful sovereign, King Dasaratha, King Janaka was filled with astonishment.

All the sages then coming together, passed the night in converse, mutually delighting each other.

King Dasaratha, being united with his sons was filled with happiness and surrendered himself wholly to King Janaka's hospitality.

The magnanimous sovereign of Mithila, having completed the orders for the preparations of the wedding ceremony, retired to rest.

CHAPTER 70

The king with Vishwamitra and the princes are invited to King Janaka's court where Vishwamitra relates the descent of the dynasty

THE following day, King Janaka, having carried out the sacrifice with the assistance of the priests, said to Shri Shatananda:—

"My younger brother, the virtuous and mighty Kushadwaja, resides in the city of Sankanshya, which is surrounded by a moat

and battlements, mounted by heavy batteries, the river Ikshu flowing at its side, and resembles the aerial chariot Pushpaka. I desire to see that Excellent One, who, with liberality, has assisted me in the act of sacrifice; it is meet that he should attend the marriage ceremony."

Having spoken thus to Shri Shatananda, certain attendants standing near, were commanded by the king to set out thither. At his command, the messengers, like gods riding out on the behest of Indra, went forth on swift horses to bring back the royal guest.

Arriving at Sankanshya, and being received by the King Kushadwaja, they acquainted him with King Janaka's proposal. The great king acquiescing to his request, came to the capital of the sovereign of Mithila and beholding the virtuous great-souled Janaka, together with Shri Shatananda, bowed down to them in salutation.

Having occupied a royal seat in the assembly, the two illustrious brothers commanded their chief minister, Sudamana, saying: " O Chief of Counsellors, speedily approach the great sovereign, Dasaratha, of limitless glory, and bring that Excellent One to my court, together with the two princes and his ministers."

Sudamana, going to the encampment of King Dasaratha, and bowing down to him, said: " O Great Hero, O Lord of Ayodhya, the sovereign of Mithila humbly invites thee with thy spiritual preceptor, thy priests and thy two sons to his assembly."

Then King Dasaratha attended by his friends and kinsmen came to the place where King Janaka sat amidst the sages and ministers. And he, the wise and eloquent monarch addressed King Janaka, saying: " O Great King, it is known to thee that the chief priest of the House of Ikshwaku is Shri Vasishtha and my spokesman in all matters. Therefore, with the approval of Shri Vishwamitra he will relate the descent of our dynasty to thee."

Having spoken, Dasaratha became silent and Shri Vasishtha then addressed King Janaka and Shri Shatananda:—

" From Brahman, the Unmanifest, the Eternal and Imperishable Brahma came forth. From him was produced Maricha, Maricha begot Kashyapa; Kashyapa begot Surya, Surya

begot Vivaswat, and Vivaswat begot Manu. Manu was the father of Ikswaku who was the first king of Ayodhya. The son of Ikswaku was Kukshi and his son was Vikukshi ; the illustrious Vana was the son of Vikukshi and Vana's son was the mighty Anranya ; his son was Prithu and the son of Prithu was Trishanku ; the great Dhundhumara was the son of Trishanku and his son was the hero Yuvanashwa. The renowned Mandhata was born of Yuvanashwa and Mandhata's son was named Susandhi. Susandhi had two sons Dhruva-sandhi and Prasenajit. Bharata was the son of Dhruva-sandhi and the renowned Asit was the son of Bharata. The three sons of Asit were Hihaxas, Talajanghas and Shashavindus, great Kings, who, hostile to their sire, waged war against him and sent him into exile. Then King Asit, with his two consorts, going to the Himalayas, there laid down his life, leaving the queens pregnant, whereat one of them, to destroy the fruit of the other's womb, gave her poison.

"At that time, a sage of the family of Bhrigu dwelt on the heights of Himalaya, by name Chyavana practising penance there. Then the lotus-eyed Queen Kalindi, desirous of bearing an excellent son approached the sage who resembled a god and bowed before him. The brahmin addressed the queen saying : 'O Fortunate One, thou bearest in thy womb, a hero, soon to be born together with the poison ; have no anxiety.'

"The queen, faithful to her deceased lord, overcome with sorrow, fearing the death of her child, paid homage to the muni. Thereafter she bore a son, born with the poison administered by the other wife and he was named Sagara.

"The son of Sagara was Asumanjas, and his son was Anshuman. The son of Anshuman was Dilipa, and Dilipa's son was Bhagiratha. The son of Bhagiratha was Kakustha and his son was Raghu. The son of Raghu, Prabradha became a demon, and was subsequently called Kalamashapada and his son was Shangana. The son of Shangana was Sudarshana, and his son was Agni-varna. Shighraga was the son of Agni-varna and the son of Shighraga was Manu. Manu's son was Prashushruka and his son was Ambarisha. Ambarisha's son was named Nahusha and his son was Yayati. The son of Yayati was Nabhaga.

" The son of Nabhaga was Aja, and the son of Aja was King Dasaratha; the two sons of King Dasaratha are Rama and Lakshmana.

" O King, I have recounted the genealogy of King Ikswaku to thee. All these kings were noble, virtuous and distinguished in their love of truth.

" King Dasaratha requests the hands of thy daughters in marriage for his two sons, who are in every way worthy to be thy kinsmen. O Chief of Men, bestow thy daughters on them."

CHAPTER 71

King Janaka gives an account of the succession and his dynasty

KING JANAKA, paying homage to the Sage Vasishtha, said: " O Maharishi, be peace with thee, hear the account of the succession of our dynasty. At the time of bestowing a daughter in marriage, it is customary for the father to recite the pedigree of his race, be gracious enough to hear me, O Lord.

" In ancient times, renowned in the three worlds was the King Nimi, eminent in virtue, a lover of truth and foremost among kings of that era. Nimi begot Mithi whose son was the first Janaka and he begot Udavasu. His son was Nandivardhana and he begot Suketu. Suketu begot the righteous Devarata and the son of Devarata was the royal Sage Brihadratha. He begot the great hero Mahavirya whose son was Dhratiman and his son was the truthful Sudhriti. He begot Dhrishta-Ketu and his son was the royal Sage Haryashwa. Haryashwa begot Maru. Then followed Prasidhaka, Kirttiratha, Devamirha, Bibudha, Mahidhraka, Kirtivaja and Maharoma. Maharoma begot Swarnaroma and his son was Hraswaroma. Hraswaroma had two sons of whom I, myself, am the elder, and this is my younger brother Kushadwaja. My father, bequeathing the kingdom to me and charging me with the care of Kushadwaja, retired to the forest. My aged sire, having passed from this world, I began to rule according to dharma,

supporting my brother with the utmost affection. After some time, the King Sudhanwa besieged the capital of Mithila, thereafter he sent me offers of peace on condition I surrendered my daughter, Sita, and also the sacred bow of Shiva to him. O Brahmarishi, on rejecting his offer a battle ensued between us in which Sudhanwa was slain. O Great Sage, King Sudhanwa being dead, I gave the kingdom of Sankasya to my well-beloved brother Kushadwaja. This is my well-beloved brother. O Sages, we submit ourselves in love, to thee.

" O Raghava, to Shri Ramachandra I give my daughter Sita, and Prince Lakshmana will receive the Princess Urmila. Sita, resembling a daughter of the gods, I bestow on Rama ; verily with my whole heart do I yield these two daughters of mine to thy sons. O King, now be pleased to inaugurate the traditional distribution of kine in charity. Perform the Nandi-Mukha[1] ceremony so that the nuptials may be celebrated.

" To-day the Magda star is in the ascendant and in three days the Uttara Phalguni will have risen ; the marriage should take place in that conjunction.

" For the purpose of ensuring their felicity, let Rama and Lakshmana now distribute cows, land, sesamum seed and other requisite offerings."

CHAPTER 72

The marriage of the four sons of King Dasaratha is arranged and preparations commence

KING JANAKA having uttered these words, Mahamuni Vishwamitra, as desired by Shri Vasishtha, said to him :—

" O King, wonderful indeed are the two Houses of Ikshwaku and Videha, their glory is limitless, verily they have no equal. Shri Rama and Sita are in perfect accord one with the other, as also Lakshmana and Urmila, each equals the other in grace and heritage. O Virtuous King, I have something further to

[1] Nandi-mukha ceremony—The distribution of cows in charity.

say, hear me. Thy younger brother, King Kushadwaja, unexcelled in virtue, has two daughters of incomparable beauty, these two I request for the sagacious Bharata and the pious Shatrughna. The four sons of King Dasaratha are youthful, handsome, resembling the gods, equal to the (four) guardians of the world. O Great King, bestow these two damsels on the younger sons of King Dasaratha. Thou art unequalled in virtue and the House of Ikswaku is without a peer."

Hearing the magnanimous words of Shri Vishwamitra echoed by Shri Vasishtha, King Janaka with joined palms humbly addressed the two august sages :—

" O Holy Ones, I am proud that you have approved the alliance of my House with the House of Ikshwaku. Your commands shall be accomplished. The daughters of King Kushadwaja shall be given to the Princes Bharata and Shatrughna in marriage. Let the four great sons of King Dasaratha be united with the four princesses on the same day. O Divine Sage, to-morrow the constellation Phalguni presided over by the deity Bhag[1] is in the ascendant. The wise consider this season as auspicious for the nuptials."

Shri Vasishtha answering " Be it so ", King Janaka, in great humility, addressed the holy sages, saying : " O Spiritual Kings, it is by your favour that I am able to offer my daughters in marriage. Regard me as your servant. Ye are worthy of these seats prepared for you. Let my kingdom now belong to the King Dasaratha and my affections extend to the kingdom of Ayodhya. I have spoken truth. O Holy Ones, do what is considered necessary."

King Dasaratha hearing with attention the words uttered by King Janaka was pleased and replied, saying : " O Brothers, possessing innumerable excellent qualities, ye have honoured the holy rishis and kings with abundant hospitality. May you be blessed ! May happiness be yours ! With your leave I shall now withdraw to my own apartments to inaugurate the preliminary rites."

Having taken leave of the King of Mithila, Shri Dasaratha, preceded by the holy sage, went away.

[1] Bhag—one of the Adityas q.v., whose special season Uttara Phalguni is considered favourable for marriages or alliances.

The following day, having fulfilled the traditional rites, King Dasaratha gave away innumerable cows in charity. On behalf of each of his sons, he bestowed on the brahmins thousands of cows whose horns were covered with gold, yielding rich milk, together with their calves. With every cow the king gave away a metal milking vessel. On that day, four hundred thousand cows were given away by him. That mighty king holding his sons supremely dear, gave incalculable wealth in their name. King Dasaratha, performing these deeds of charity, surrounded by his sons, resembled Brahma attended by the Regents of the world.

CHAPTER 73

The marriage ceremonies are completed

ON the day on which King Dasaratha distributed the cows in charity, the great hero Yudhajit, the son of the King Kaikeya and the maternal uncle of Bharata, also came to Janaka's capital.

Seeing King Dasaratha, he made enquiries as to his welfare and said: " O King, the Lord of Kaikeya, through affection, sends tidings of his well-being to thee, and seeks to know if it be well with thy friends. O Great King, my father desired to see Prince Bharata, and for this purpose I went to Ayodhya. There, hearing that thou hadst gone to Mithila with thy sons, for their nuptials, I came hither in haste to see the son of my sister."[1]

King Dasaratha thereupon duly honoured his kinsman who spent the night happily in company with the princes.

The following day, rising early, King Dasaratha performing his customary devotions, proceeded to the sacrificial pavilion, escorted by the sages.

At an auspicious hour in the presence of Shri Vasishtha and other sages, Shri Ramachandra and his brothers adorned with every ornament being present, the preliminary ceremonies were performed.

[1] = Bharata being the son of Queen Kaikeyi, daughter of the King of Kaikeyi.

Then Shri Vasishtha addressed King Janaka saying: "O King, King Dasaratha has inaugurated the preliminary ceremonies, he now awaits thy pleasure. The sacred rite is completed when host and guests come together. Be pleased, therefore, to perform the principal nuptial rites."

King Janaka listened to the words of the great-souled Vasishtha and answered: "What guard detains King Dasaratha at the gate? Whose sanction does his royal majesty seek? Is not this his house? Let the king enter! O Chief of Sages, my daughters, in readiness, stand at the altar, bright as the clear flame. I, standing near, await you all. There is no need for delay. Let the king cause the ceremony to take place without further hindrance."

Then King Dasaratha with his sons and the holy sages entered the marriage pavilion. Thereafter, King Janaka addressed Shri Vasishtha, saying: "O Virtuous Sage, with the other sages perform the wedding ceremony."

Then Shri Vasishtha ignited the sacrificial fire in the centre of the pavilion. Shri Vishwamitra and Shri Shatananda standing before him, sprinkled the altar with perfume, and decorated it with flowers. Then he set out the golden vessels and the sacred kusha grass, filling many pots with incense and arranging them in the form of a conchshell. Dishes filled with parched corn and rice were placed there, and durbha grass spread about, the sacred formulas being pronounced over them. The holy rishis now lit a fire pronouncing the Vedic mantrams and offered oblations into it.

Shri Sita, adorned with jewels, took her seat by the sacred fire opposite Shri Ramachandra. King Janaka, addressing the Son of Raghu, said: "O Rama, from to-day my daughter Sita will be thy companion in virtue. Accept her, O Prince, and take her hand in thine. This fortunate princess, faithful and tender, will constantly attend thee, following thee like a shadow, in loving obedience. May you both be happy."

Saying this, King Janaka sprinkled on them water purified by mantrams. Then all the gods cried, "Jai! Jai!"[1] and divine music sounded, while a shower of flowers fell from the skies.

Thus was Sita joined in marriage to Shri Ramachandra.

[1] Jai! Jai!—literally Victory! Victory!

Then King Janaka said to Shri Lakshmana: "O Lakshmana, come hither, peace be with thee! Take in thy hand the hand of my daughter Urmila, tarry not, O Prince."

Having thus spoken, Janaka likewise addressed Prince Bharata, saying: "O Son of Raghu, accept the hand of the Princess Mandavi" and to Prince Shatrughna, he said: "O Great Prince, accept the hand of Shruta-kirtti. O Princes of the House of Raghu, be gentle and faithful to your wives as they will be to you, receive them now, let there be no delay."

Thus instructed by King Janaka, the four princes, taking the hands of the four princesses as directed by the Sage Vasishtha, circumambulated the fire, King Janaka and the sages performing the rites as ordained by the sacred ordinance.

As the nuptial ceremony of the four princes of the House of Raghu with the four princesses terminated, a rain of flowers fell on them from the sky. Divine music sounded, nymphs danced and the celestial singers broke into paeons of praise. All these marvellous events marked the wedding of the sons of King Dasaratha while the princes, circumambulating the fire, were united with their brides.

Thereafter with their wives, they returned to their apartments and King Janaka with his relatives and friends, with a joyful heart having taken part in the festivities, also withdrew.

CHAPTER 74

Parasurama appears amidst inauspicious signs

THE night being past, the great Sage Vishwamitra took leave of King Dasaratha and King Janaka and, blessing the princes and their sire, departed for the Himalayas to meditate there. The holy rishi being gone, King Dasaratha begged the permission of the Lord of Mithila to return to his capital. Bidding farewell to the pious king, Janaka escorted him for some distance on his way.

To the King of Ayodhya, on behalf of his daughter, King

Janaka gave a hundred thousand cows, woollen cloths, countless silken robes and richly decorated elephants, horses and chariots. He also bestowed on him male and female attendants, numberless golden coins with quantities of pearls and coral. All these and many other gifts King Janaka gave with a joyful mind, and having taken leave of King Dasaratha, returned to Mithila, whereupon King Dasaratha with his illustrious sons, preceded by the sages, started on the homeward journey, accompanied by his army.

As the sages, with Shri Ramachandra, advanced in company with the king, the screeching of strange and terrible birds was heard, while frightened deer fled across their path.

Perceiving these inauspicious signs, the king addressed Shri Vasishtha, saying: "O Holy Guru, why do the birds cry thus ominously, and the deer traverse our path? What do these omens portend? My mind is filled with anxiety, O Divine Lord."

The Maharishi Vasishtha, in gentle tones, replied: "O King, the fearful crying of the birds betokens some great danger, but the crossing of the deer from left to right indicates a speedy end to thy fears."

While they were yet speaking, the earth began to quake and and giant trees fell down, darkness covered the earth and clouds of dust veiled the sun, nor could the cardinal points be discerned. In the great dust storm that followed, the army was overwhelmed with terror and all became paralysed, save Shri Vasishtha, King Dasaratha and the princes alone.

When the dust was allayed and the army somewhat recovered, Shri Vasishtha beheld the son of Yamadagni of dreadful aspect. With matted hair, Parasurama, the humbler of the pride of kings and emperors, drew near.

The appearance of the muni resembling the splendour of Mount Kailasha or the fires of dissolution at the end of the world-period was hardly to be borne by human eyes. With his battle axe on his shoulder, bearing a mighty bow, brilliant as lightning, he appeared like Shiva about to strike down Tripura.[1]

Beholding Parasurama resembling a blazing fire, the sages reflected among themselves and said: "His father being slain,

[1] Tripura—the name of a demon slain by Shiva.

has Parasurama come again to destroy the warrior caste?" Was not his anger appeased when he formerly destroyed the whole warrior caste? Has he come again to take his revenge on us?"

Reflecting thus, they approached Parasurama with traditional offerings, saying: "O Rama, accept this arghya."

Shri Parasurama accepting the offering, then addressed Shri Rama.

CHAPTER 75

He challenges Rama to combat

"O RAMA, O Illustrious Hero, I have heard of thy great prowess. I have also been acquainted with thy heroic deed, the breaking of the bow at Janakapura, verily a feat exciting wonder and surpassing imagination. Having heard of thine achievement, I, taking this other bow, have come hither. With this terrible bow named Yamadagni, show thy strength, O Rama, and placing an arrow in it, discharge it. Should'st thou be able to accomplish this, I will engage in honourable combat with thee."

Hearing these words, King Dasaratha, became dejected and humbly addressed the rishi, saying: "O Holy Parasurama, thou art a great brahmin sage, it becomes thee not to show anger to warriors; be gracious unto my son, who is still a child. Thou art born in the family of Bhrigu and hast pledged thyself to Indra to bear arms no more. Having given the dominion of the world to Kashyapa and retired to the Mahendra mountain to practise asceticism, why hast thou now come hither to destroy us? O Sage, if Rama is slain, none of us will survive."

The great son of Jamadagni, disregarding the entreaty of King Dasaratha, again addressed Rama, saying: "O Rama, these two bows of exquisite design, famed throughout the world, exceedingly powerful, were forged by Vishwakarma.[1] One of them, wielded by Shri Shiva in combat with Tripura, was broken by thee. The other, held by me, of inexpressible power, was

[1] Vishwakarma—the architect of the gods.

given to Vishnu by the gods and is known to give victory over the foe; it is equal in moment to that which thou hast broken.

" Formerly the gods asked Brahma which of the two excelled the other and Shri Brahma, acquainted with their intention, invoked a quarrel between Vishnu and Mahadeva. They entered into combat one with the other. By the shout raised by Shri Vishnu, Shri Mahadeva was struck motionless and his bow unstrung. Then the gods and rishis came to that place and caused the two gods to be reconciled. Thereafter the gods esteemed the bow of Vishnu to be the more powerful and Shri Shiva surrendered his bow to the King of Mithila, together with all its arrows.

" This bow, belonging to Vishnu, was given in ancient times by that god to Richika and he gave it to his son Jamadagni, my father. He having renounced the bearing of weapons, retired to practise austerity, when the rash and foolish monarch Sahasravaku slew him. Hearing of the cruel death of my sire, I successively destroyed the warrior caste, from generation to generation, thus acquiring dominion over the earth. I conferred this great dominion as a gift on the Sage Kashyapa at the completion of a sacrifice, and retired to the Mahendra mountain, cheerfully observing the practice of Yoga. To-day, O Valiant Prince, acquainted with thy great achievement, I have come hither to behold thee. Receive this bow, bestowed on my ancestors by Shri Vishnu and in the spirit of a warrior, place an arrow on it. If thou succeed in drawing the bow, I will challenge thee to fight."

CHAPTER 76

Parasurama is vanquished and deprived of his glory and power

HEARING these words, Shri Rama having regard for the presence of his sire, answered with restraint, saying: " O Parasurama, thy deeds are known to me, as also the avenging of thy fathers' murderers. Methinks thou dost deem me lacking in valour,

I, a kshatriya, and a descendant of the Solar race. O Rishi, witness my prowess."

Having spoken thus, Shri Ramachandra, incensed, seized the bow and arrows from the rishi's hands and stringing it, placed an arrow on it. While drawing the mighty bow, the son of Dasaratha addressed the rishi with defiance, saying: "O Sage, thou art a brahmin and as such do I honour thee; thou art further a kinsman of Shri Vishwamitra, therefore I shall not slay thee with this arrow, but by this shaft I will rob thee of the power of motion so that thou shalt no longer be able to travel through space, or I will banish thee from those high regions to which thou hast attained by the practice of penance. Say, what is thy desire? This divine arrow of Vishnu, possessing the power of vanquishing the strength and pride of the foe, may not be restored by me to the quiver, till it has accomplished its great purpose."

When Rama placed the arrow in the sacred bow, Brahma, with the gods, assembled to behold that glorious deed, followed by the gandharvas, apsaras, yakshas and other beings. Shri Ramachandra, having taken up the mighty bow, the three worlds began to tremble and Parasurama, bereft of his divine power, stood aghast. Deprived of his glory and powerless, Shri Parasurama with humble entreaty, addressed the lotus-eyed Rama:—

"When the dominion of the earth was given by me to the sage Kashyapa, he said 'Thou must not inhabit this kingdom'. Therefore, O Rama, in obedience to the sage, I do not stay on the earth by night. This world is no longer mine, but belongs to Kashyapa. O Rama, do not deprive me of the power of movement, but allow me speedily to return to the beautiful Mahendra mountain. Thou can'st deprive me of the merits earned by the practice of Yoga. I know Thee to be the Imperishable, Thou art verily Vishnu Himself, none but Thou could'st wield this bow. O Son of Raghu, the gods have assembled to behold Thee; Thou art pre-eminent in combat, and the conqueror of Thine enemies. O Virtuous Prince, to be defeated by Thee is no ignominy; discharge Thy matchless arrow and I will return to the Mahendra mountain."

Thereupon Shri Ramachandra discharged the arrow and the merit of Parasurama was rendered void, whereupon he speedily departed to the Mahendra mountain.

The darkness being dispelled and the whole world once more filled with light, Rama was worshipped by the gods and rishis, and Shri Parasurama having circumambulated the son of Dasaratha, returned to his own hermitage.

CHAPTER 77

King Dasaratha with his army, the princes and their brides, return to Ayodhya

SHRI PARASURAMA having departed, Shri Rama delivered the bow and arrows as a trust to the god Varuna. Having offered salutations to Shri Vasishtha and the other sages he, seeing his father filled with apprehension, addressed him, saying: " Sire, Shri Parasurama has now gone, do thou command thine army to proceed towards Ayodhya."

King Dasaratha, hearing Rama's words, embraced him and reflected that his son was born to him a second time. Then summoning his army to advance, he in a chariot, adorned with banners, to the fanfare of trumpets proclaiming victory, entered Ayodhya.

The streets of the city sprinkled with water and flowers, appeared beautiful, and the citizens rejoicing at the return of their sovereign, greeted him with shouts of welcome.

Met by the brahmins inhabiting the city, the king with his friends and relatives, followed by the princes and their brides, entered the royal palace which was white as snow.

There, the kindred of the king welcomed him with garlands and sandalwood. The Queens Kaushalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi received the brides and conducted the fortunate Sita, the illustrious Urmila, and the two daughters of Kushadwaj to their palace, with auspicious rites. Arrayed in sumptuous silken robes, and borne to the temple to worship the holy images, the

brides then offered respectful salutations to their mother-in-laws, and others worthy of honour. Thereafter, each began to live with her lord in her own palace.

Shri Ramachandra with the other princes, possessing the knowledge of the use of weapons and the science of defence, passed the time with their friends in attendance on their aged sire.

After some time, King Dasaratha said to his son Bharata: "O my Son, thy maternal uncle, who came for the purpose of taking thee to his home, still tarries in the capital, therefore, go with him to see thy grandfather."

Prince Bharata and Prince Shatrughna prepared to start on their journey and took leave of their father and their highly compassionate brother Rama.

Bharata being gone, Shri Rama and Lakshmana ministered to the aged king as if he were a god and in his name performed charitable deeds among the people of the city.

Rama also ministered to his mother with deep affection, and served his Guru with single-minded devotion. His noble behaviour gratified the king, the brahmins, merchants and other castes; his sweet disposition and pious conduct charmed the people of the capital. Rama, wholly devoted to truth was renowned for his virtue, and endowed with every excellent quality like Swayambhu[1]-Brahma himself.

For a long time did Shri Rama enjoy a life of content with Sita. To him, she was dear beyond all things and he surrendered his whole heart to her. Love is enhanced by beauty, virtue and gentleness, and Sita possessed all these in an equal degree with Rama. Lovely as a goddess, Shri Sita was able to discern the thoughts of her lord before he expressed them. The beautiful Sita with Shri Ramachandra wholly satisfied, resembled Lakshmi, the consort of the incomparable Vishnu.

[1] Swayambhu—the Imperishable or Self-existent, a name of Brahma, the creator.

END OF BALA KANDA

BOOK II

AYODHYA KANDA

CHAPTER I

King Dasaratha desires to see Prince Rama made regent, and summons a council

THE great souled Bharata affectionately requested the pious Shatrughna to accompany him, on the journey to his maternal grandfather.

Enjoying abundant hospitality and held by their uncle Ashwapati in all affection, the two brothers dwelt there happily. Satisfied with the love and entertainment bestowed on them, they daily remembered their royal sire, the aged monarch, and the king also thought of his sons, now in a distant country.

The four sons of the aged king were as dear to him as his own four arms issuing from his body, yet Rama resembling Brahma, endowed with every good attribute, was dearest to his sire. Shri Rama, the eternal Purusha,[1] the Lord Vishnu himself, descended on earth on the entreaty of the gods, to slay Ravana, the enemy of the whole world.

The charming Queen Kaushalya, glowing with maternal love for her son Ramachandra, resembled Aditi at the birth of Indra.

Unequalled in beauty, brave and chivalrous, never speaking ill of others, Rama inherited the virtues of his illustrious father; of a cheerful disposition, speaking soft words to all, never returning a harsh answer when treated with contumely; when injured, pardoning the offender and remembering the offence no more; showing gratitude for the least of favours and devoting his leisure from affairs of state to seeking the friendship of those eminent in wisdom, learning, age and conduct. Wise and generous, he was foremost in addressing others, speaking with affection; supremely courageous yet not rendered vain-glorious by his own powers; never uttering falsehood, honouring the learned and the aged, showing regard for his people who

[1] Purusha—literally lord of the city of nine gates, i.e. the body—the dweller in the body as the indwelling Lord.

were devoted to him; having overcome wrath; surpassingly compassionate, venerating the brahmins; showing extreme pity for the poor; well-versed in public and individual responsibilities, fulfilling his domestic duties, not only to add lustre to the dynasty but also to attain an exalted state in the other world. Wise in the discharge of his obligations; as a Scion of the House of Ikshwaku, proving himself tender and loving to those who sought his protection; restraining the evil-doer; ever seeking the weal of his subjects; eschewing frivolous pursuits and shallow talk; neither hearing nor speaking aught against dharma; in debate equal in eloquence to Brihaspati; free from infirmities; youthful, handsome, having knowledge of time and space and being able to divine the contents of a man's heart at a single glance; verily a great sage and for his marvellous qualities as dear to the people as life itself. Profoundly learned in the science and the philosophy of the Veda, which he had studied with his spiritual preceptor, he even excelled his father in the art of warfare. The repository of all auspiciousness, virtuous, cheerful, truthful and guileless; having received full instruction from the learned brahmins in sacred and secular policy, knowing the significance of virtue, material prosperity and enjoyment; of prodigious memory, conversant with worldly wisdom, possessing a pleasing disposition, gentle, able to conceal his thoughts; recognizing when to refuse and when to accept material gifts; winning many friends, firm in his devotion to his Guru and to God, countenancing no sin; never uttering a bitter word or one which would agitate the hearts of others; energetic, deploring his own faults whilst excusing those of others; a great advocate, grateful, lending support to those he held in affection; in all circumstances true to his word; capable of protecting the interests of his family and friends; knowing how to meet out retribution to the wicked. Acquiring wealth by just means, and appreciating how to distribute it with discrimination. Proficient in the Veda, following the literary and dramatic arts with enthusiasm, endowed with the gift of oratory in Sanskrita and his own native tongue; depending on right alone for felicity and prosperity; prudent, accomplished in sport, music and painting; an incomparable rider whether mounted on horse or elephant; skilled in archery, renowned

in the field, forestalling the enemy in attack and knowing how to destroy his defences; fired with righteous wrath when engaging in combat, so that neither god nor titan could withstand him; speaking nought against any; free from pride and envy; ever submissive, yet overruled in his resolve by none; pre-eminent among his people; renowned in the three worlds; in forbearance resembling the earth, in wisdom equal to Brihaspati, in courage like unto Indra.

Shining resplendent like the full moon in the love of his people and his sire, worshipped for his excellent qualities, his matchless valour and his integrity, the earth desired to make him her lord.

Seeing his illustrious son manifesting these qualities, King Dasaratha began to reflect in this wise: "I have become old and have ruled a full measure of years. I desire to see Rama crowned while I yet live!"

This inclination grew in the mind of the king, and he waited eagerly for the time when he might resign his throne in favour of Rama. He reflected: "Rama, resembling a cloud, raining compassion on all; beloved far beyond myself; in valour equal to Yama and Indra, in understanding like Brihaspati, in endurance like unto a mountain, exceeding myself in excellent attributes; on him do I desire to confer the dominion of the earth; this will be my heaven."

Then that great sovereign summoning his ministers communicated to them his resolve to proclaim Rama, endowed with those powers, rare even in a king, and a mine of surpassing virtues, as heir-apparent.

At that time, inauspicious portents appeared on the earth, and in the heavens, and the king, conscious that he had grown old, reflected that by bestowing the throne on Rama, he would gratify his comely son, and also assuage his own sorrow and benefit his people. Filled with affection for his subjects, and for their good, he desired to increase their felicity by installing Rama as heir-apparent, when the hour was auspicious.

Summoning the subject princes and the inhabitants of other cities and lands with due respect, the aged monarch entertained them in his palaces, bestowing on them gifts of various kinds, but the sovereign of Kaikeya and the king of Mithila were not

informed of the occasion since they would hear of it thereafter. Seated in the assembly, the king resembled Prajapati in the midst of his subjects.

The kings of the earth coming together in council, King Dasaratha occupying the throne and they taking the places prepared for them, reverently faced the royal dais, observing the traditions of the court. Surrounded by his feudal lords and the elders, the king appeared like Indra sitting among the gods.

CHAPTER 2

The elders and councillors willingly accept Shri Rama as regent

IN ringing tones, King Dasaratha addressed the leaders of the people seated before him, uttering words delighting their hearts.

When the aged monarch began to speak, his words resembled the beat of drums, or the crashing of thunder, yet they were filled with great sweetness withal and uttered in the manner of a king. He said: "It is well known to you that this vast empire was upheld by my predecessors and their fathers before them. To promote the prosperity and felicity of the kingdom, formerly protected by the Kings of Ikshwaku, I, walking in the path trodden by my forbears, have preserved it to the utmost. Having passed sixty thousand years under the royal canopy, my body has become old and feeble and seeks repose. The burdens of state, not able to be sustained by those of uncontrolled mind, have I borne, and now am weary. To-day, therefore, with the approval of the learned brahmins present here and for the good of my people, I desire to surrender the dominion to the protection of my eldest son. Possessing every essential virtue, Shri Ramachandra, my beloved son, equal to Indra in prowess and the conqueror of his foes, excelling in every virtue, resembles the moon accompanied by the Pushya[1] star.

[1] Pushya—name of the sixth lunar mansion, also a constellation of three stars.

"I desire to install as regent,[2] Rama, exalted among men, elder brother of Lakshmana, worthy to be your protector. In truth, I verily believe that not only the earth, but the three worlds will regard him as their lord. Desiring the joy of the universe, I shall lay upon him the weight of government and thus be freed from anxiety concerning the kingdom.

"If this seems proper to you, give me your counsel or say what should otherwise be done. Though this be my decree, yet should you judge aught else to be a better way, then speak that I may know of it. The best course is well known to be determined after careful deliberation."

Hearing the words of King Dasaratha, the other monarchs and elders cried in unison, "Excellent, Excellent!" Upon this, a sound like distant thunder, pleasant to hear, or like the cry of peacocks delighting in the storm, arose. Thereafter, the purpose of the sovereign being communicated to all, acclamations burst forth that shook the foundations of the palace.

Then the learned brahmins, the ministers, kings and the elders of the city assembled for consultation with those who had come from afar, and being of one mind, after due deliberation, thus addressed the king :—

"O Mighty Sovereign, thou hast ruled for thousands of years and have now become old, do thou, therefore, appoint Rama as regent. It is our cherished desire that the glorious Prince Rama should be seen by us, riding on an elephant beneath the royal canopy."

The king, wishing to fathom their true motives, replied with candour, saying: "Acting on my suggestion, you have all expressed your willingness to see Rama appointed regent, yet there is still some uncertainty in my mind; tell me frankly why you desire to see Rama crowned. Have I erred? Have I failed to govern righteously?"

Then the elders of the people and the counsellors answered the sagacious sovereign Dasaratha in this wise: "O King, thy son is endowed with excellent attributes. Hear of the divine and amiable qualities of the wise and perfect Ramachandra, qualities endearing him to all and pleasing to record.

[2] Regent—Yuvaraja = heir-apparent.

" In his love and zeal for truth, he is equal to Indra. Thou, O King, art exalted above all in the House of Ikshwaku, yet none in the world practises righteousness as does Shri Rama.

" By his conduct, he has added lustre to virtue and prosperity. Diffusing happiness among his people, he resembles the moon delighting the earth. In forbearance, he is like the earth, in wisdom like Brihaspati, in valour like Indra. With a deep regard for truth, free from envy and jealousy, his disposition is excellent.

" Forgiving every injury, a comforter of the afflicted and the distressed, he addresses all with gentleness. Acknowledging every favour received in full measure, self-controlled, true to his word whatever betide, speaking no ill of others, of candid utterance, full of wisdom he ever reveres the aged.

" Of immeasurable renown, Shri Rama, whose glory and splendour constantly increase, who in the science of archery is superior even to the gods, asuras and men, who has studied all the branches of learning and the Veda, is also unequalled in the art of music. The abode of peace and prosperity, ever courteous, humble and wise, and who, having received the highest instruction from the brahmins, is skilful in expounding the meaning of the Veda.

" When in company with Lakshmana, he goes to the attack, storming towns and villages, he never withdraws without wholly defeating the enemy. Returning triumphant, he enquires after the welfare of his subjects as if they were his own sons, and gives special thought to the well-being of women, servants and his disciples as a father regards the needs of his family.

" O Sire, Shri Rama graciously enquires respecting our own disciples whether they render us proper service and hospitality and further discharge their duties faithfully.

" He suffers with the afflicted and rejoices like a parent when his people hold a festival. That mighty archer, the observer of truth, the servant of the aged, who blesses all those who seek his protection, is wholly righteous. Performing noble deeds, he will not hear or utter words that create discord. Possessing a charming brow and large eyes, in this resembling Vishnu himself, Rama, by the process of deduction, is able to converse with eloquence. By his courage, prowess, self-reliance and patience, he has become the delight of his people.

" Ever ready to serve his subjects, scorning sensual pleasures, he is able to rule the three worlds, how much more this tiny earth ?

" His joy and anger are never excited without cause. He destroys those meriting death, but shows mercy to the innocent.

" Liberal to those who have found favour with him ; willing to suffer in the exercise of self-control ; beloved of his subjects, he evokes devotion in every virtuous heart.

" Brilliant as the moon by reason of his excellent attributes, the earth claims him as her lord.

" O King, thou art fortunate in possessing this great son who resembles Kashyapa, the son of Marichi. The people of Ayodhya and the citizens of the kingdom of Koshala continually pray for Rama's life and well-being.

" Men, women, the aged and those from far and near, at dawn and eventide, unitedly pray to all the gods that Shri Rama may ever be attended by prosperity. O Great King, graciously accede to our request. O Giver of boons, we beg thee to install Shri Rama as regent without delay. Thy son, resembling Shri Vishnu himself, is benevolent and generous to all. O King, do this with a cheerful mind."

CHAPTER 3

The king resolves Shri Rama shall be installed

To those who with joined palms were making this petition, King Dasaratha answered courteously :—

" To-day, indeed, I am happy and fortunate since the people desire my son, Shri Rama, to be proclaimed regent."

Thus, in the presence of his subjects, the king in gracious accents addressed Shri Vasishtha, Vamadeva and other sages :—

" In this month of Chitra, when the woods are beautiful with flowering trees, be pleased, O Holy Ones, to prepare all things for the installation of my son as heir-apparent."

After the king had spoken, the people applauded, and when the shouts of acclamation had died away, the monarch addressed the mighty Sage Vasishtha, saying: "O Blessed Lord, it is meet that thou shouldest order those things needful for the coronation ceremony."

Then Shri Vasishtha commanded the ministers in attendance to provide gold, gems, unguents, garlands of white flowers, parched rice, honey and clarified butter in separate vessels, also new cloths, chariots, weapons of all kinds, a complete army, elephants free from any imperfection, white flags, a white canopy, chamaras,[1] a hundred vessels of gold shining like fire, bulls with gilded horns, lion skins and other requisites.

Then the Sage Vasishtha commanded them, saying: "Place all these in the king's sacred pavilion. Let every gate in the capital and the private apartments of the palace be decorated with garlands and sandalwood, and let fragrant incense be kindled everywhere.

"O Ye Accomplished Ministers, provide sweet and health-giving foods, milks and curds in attractive dishes sufficient to feed a hundred thousand brahmins. To-morrow the holy brahmins should be respectfully served with butter, curdled milk and parched rice, and presented with as much dakshina as will preserve them from want for the remainder of their lives.

"To-morrow, early in the morning, the Peace Chant should be recited, therefore, let the holy brahmins be invited and their seats prepared. Let banners and arches of flowers be displayed everywhere, and the roads sprinkled with water. Let beautifully attired singing girls with their attendants wait at the gates of the palace; let food and cooling drinks be provided at all the principal crossroads, also gifts of money and ritual objects that are considered sacred; let fruit and flowers be sent separately; let armed warriors clothed in clean raiment and armed with scimitars, wait in the courtyard of the king."

In this manner, Shri Vasishtha and Shri Vamadeva performed all that had been required by the king and, everything being carried out to their satisfaction, they informed the great monarch accordingly. Then the illustrious sovereign said to the prime minister Sumantra: "Let the accomplished Prince Rama be brought

[1] Chamaras—Whisks made of yaks' tails.

here with all speed." Acquiescing in the royal command, Sumantra brought thither in a royal chariot that great warrior, Shri Rama. Surrounded by the rulers of the earth, the east, the west, the north and the south, the kings of aryan and non-aryan descent and those from the forests and the hills, King Dasaratha looked like Indra in the midst of the gods.

He beheld his son Shri Ramachandra, handsome, valorous, of mighty length of arm, fearless, walking like an intoxicated elephant, his countenance resembling the moon, fair to look upon, captivating the hearts of all by his virtue and generosity, refreshing his subjects as clouds refresh those afflicted with the heat.

The monarch could not gaze sufficiently on his beloved son as he, attended by Sumantra who followed him with reverence, alighted from his chariot and ascended the steps of the royal palace which resembled Mount Kailasha. Approaching the king he announced his name and made profound obeisance at his feet.

Seeing the prince standing respectfully at his side, the king embraced him and asked him to occupy the golden throne set with jewels and gold. Raghava thus seated looked like the sun rising on the Sumeru mountain. The whole assembly was illumined by the presence of Shri Rama who resembled the moon riding in the autumn sky filled with innumerable stars.

As a man adorned with many ornaments is overjoyed with delight to see his own image reflected in a mirror, so was King Dasaratha filled with ineffable delight when beholding the glory of his son; and like Kashyapa addressing Indra, the mighty sovereign smilingly spoke to Rama :—

" O My Son, thou art the offspring of my chief queen and do resemble her, thou art exceedingly dear to me, endowed as thou art with all the great attributes, thou hast imbued thy people with thy noble qualities; accept therefore the high office of regent. Notwithstanding, My Son, that thou art by nature endowed with all good qualities and art humble, yet hear while I tell thee that which is for thy good.

" Keep far from thee those evil habits born of love, pleasure and anger; through thy secret service acquaint thyself closely with all the happenings of thy kingdom and other domains,

as though they took place before thine eyes. Give pleasure to thy people by filling the various storehouses and arsenals. O Prince, that sovereign who rules his subjects with due regard to their happiness causes his friends to rejoice like the gods who have drunk the nectar of immortality. Wherefore, O my Child, conduct thyself with a mind fully subdued."

Then, the friends of Rama acquainted Queen Kaushalya of the king's resolve and she rewarded the messengers of these good tidings with many cows and gems.

Shri Rama, hearing the king's words, answered: "So be it," and, bowing to the great monarch, left the palace in his chariot, the people greeting him with joy as he passed by.

Satisfied with the sovereign's decree, they acclaimed him with salutations and returning to their homes worshipped their gods, propitiating them so that no impediment should arise in the installation of Shri Rama as regent.

CHAPTER 4

Shri Rama and Princess Sita prepare for the ceremony

THE citizens having departed, the king again consulted his ministers, saying to them: "To-morrow, the Pushya star is in the ascendant, I decree, therefore, that the lotus-eyed Rama shall then be installed as my successor."

Dismissing his counsellors, the king, entering the inner apartment, commanded Sumantra to bring Rama to him once more. In obedience to the command of his royal master, Sumantra repaired to the palace of Rama, to bring him thither.

Rama, hearing the doorkeeper announce the second visit of the minister, became anxious and sending for him with all haste inquired of him the purport of his coming. Sumantra answered, saying: "The king desires to see thee." Shri Rama thereupon hastily repaired to the palace of his royal parent.

King Dasaratha retiring to the private apartment, issued instructions that Rama should be brought thither. The prince,

entering his father's palace, bowed low, with joined palms, from a distance, and contemplated his sire.

The king, raising him up, embraced him and, giving him a seat, again addressed him :—

" O Prince, I have now grown old and have ruled long, enjoying all the pleasures of the heart. I have also performed hundreds of sacrifices and distributed great quantities of food and lavish gifts as alms to the brahmins. O Great One, a son such as thou art, is the fruit of much charity and study of the Veda. O Most Excellent One, what I desired to give in charity, I have given, and I have studied the Veda and offered up many sacrifices. My desire for pleasure is past ; I have discharged every obligation to the gods, the sages, my ancestors and the learned brahmins, nothing remains to be accomplished by me but thine installation. O My Son, hear me, it is the will of my people that thou become their sovereign ; I shall, therefore, install thee as my successor. Nevertheless, O Rama, fearful dreams have visited me at night, attended by the roar of thunder and the falling of meteors, signs betokening opposition. O Rama, the star of my birth is surrounded by the sun, Mars and Rahu ; those versed in divination speak of it as of evil augury, that portends either the death of a king or the visitation of some grave calamity. O Prince of Raghu, I desire to see thee crowned before my senses fail. Verily, the mind of man is inconstant. To-day, the astrologers announce that Purnavasu is in the ascendant, but to-morrow it will be the Pushya star, auspicious to thy coronation. I desire thee, therefore, to be proclaimed regent to-morrow. Do thou, from now on, fast with thy spouse, passing the night on a bed of kusha grass, with a stone for thy pillow. It is the duty of the friends surrounding thee to guard thee. In such undertakings many obstructions arise.

" Prince Bharata is in the city of his grandsire, it is my will that thou be installed in his absence. Thy brother, Bharata, is virtuous, compassionate, master of his senses and obedient to thee, yet, O Prince, I know the mind of man to be fickle, even the mind of a righteous and devout man may be subject to inconstancy. To-morrow, thy coronation shall take place, therefore, now return to thy abode."

King Dasaratha having thus spoken, Shri Rama left for his palace. Entering his own abode, anxious to acquaint Janaki with the king's proposal and not finding the princess in her own apartment, Rama repaired to the palace of his mother. There he beheld the Queen Kaushalya, seated in the temple, observing the vow of silence and praying for her son's welfare. Acquainted with the sovereign's decree, Shri Lakshmana and Sumitra were already in the palace of the chief queen, and Sita also having been summoned thither was sitting at her side.

Queen Kaushalya attended by Queen Sumitra, Lakshmana and Sita, having heard that Shri Rama would be installed when the Pushya star was in the ascendant, was meditating on Narayana,[1] with closed eyes and controlled breathing.

Shri Rama, approaching his mother, paid reverence to her and joyfully exclaimed: "O Mother, my father has commanded me to serve the people and to-morrow I am to take up the burden of government. Shri Vasishtha, my preceptor, and other sages have ordained that the Princess Sita should, this night, fast with me. At dawn, the Princess Sita and I will carry out those prayers and rites proper to the occasion."

Queen Kaushalya, long desirous of this event, with tears of joy flowing from her eyes, answered: "O My Beloved Son Rama, mayest thou live long and may all thine enemies perish. Acquiring the throne, mayest thou bring joy to thy friends, relatives and also Queen Sumitra. O Child, surely thou wert born under an auspicious star since thou hast won favour with thy royal sire by thine excellent attributes. The purpose of my devotion and austerity, undertaken to please the lotus-eyed Narayana, has been fulfilled to-day inasmuch as thou art about to obtain the kingdom of the dynasty of Raghu."

Shri Rama listening to his mother's words, smilingly addressed Shri Lakshmana, he who ever paid honour to his father, and said: "O Lakshmana, share with me the government of the kingdom, thou art my second self, the dominion is equally thine. O Brother, I desire life and a kingdom for thy sake."

Thereafter, Shri Rama, bowing to the two queens, with their permission withdrew with Sita to his own apartment.

[1] Narayana—a name of the Lord, the waters (nara) being His first centre of motion.

CHAPTER 5

On Vasishtha's advice they observe a fast

KING DASARATHA, having acquainted his son Rama with the knowledge of his approaching regency, now called his spiritual preceptor, Shri Vasishtha, and addressed him, saying : " O Sage, whose only wealth is austerity, graciously approach Shri Rama and cause him to observe a fast with Princess Sita in preparation for his coronation."

Shri Vasishtha answering, " Be it so ", went himself to Shri Rama's palace. Ascending a chariot drawn by two horses, he drove to the palace, and entering by the three gates, approached the abode of Raghava, white as a cloud.

Shri Rama hearing of the arrival of his preceptor, speedily went forth to welcome him and offer him due obeisance. Taking him by the hand, he assisted him to alight from the chariot and, studying his mood, made enquiries as to his well-being.

The venerable Vasishtha said : " O Rama, thy royal parent is gracious to thee, to-morrow thou shalt be proclaimed ruler of the kingdom, do thou observe a fast to-day. To-morrow, King Dasaratha will install thee as regent, as Nahusha of old made over his kingdom to Yayati."

Having uttered these words, the knower of truth, the sovereign of munis, requested Rama and Sita to observe a fast that night.

Then Shri Ramachandra respectfully saluted Shri Vasishtha, and the royal preceptor accepting his salutation departed for his abode.

Conversing delightfully with his friends, Shri Rama, when requested by them, retired to the inner apartments. The palace of Raghava was crowded with joyful men and women, and resembled a lake filled with lotuses visited by innumerable birds.

Leaving the palace, Shri Vasishtha perceived the streets to be filled with people. All the roads entering Ayodhya were so crowded with spectators eager to witness Shri Rama's coronation that none could pass to and fro without difficulty. The sound of the multitudes shouting with joy, filling the highways, resembled the roaring of the sea.

All the streets of the capital were swept and sprinkled with water; on either side, flower garlands were hanging, and every house was decorated with flags and banners. Men and women, children and the aged, all anxiously awaiting the dawn, so that they might witness the sacred ceremony, looked forward with eagerness to the great festival that would promote their happiness.

The priest Shri Vasishtha, avoiding the crowded streets, at length reached the royal palace. Ascending the balcony which resembled a white cloud, he greeted the king as Brihaspati pays homage to Indra.

Seeing the sage approaching, the king rose and enquired as to what Shri Rama had said. Shri Vasishtha answered, "All is prepared". As the king rose from his throne, the whole assembly stood up to honour the venerable sage.

Having heard his spiritual preceptor's report, the king, dismissing the court, withdrew to the inner apartment, as a lion enters its cave. Entering those gorgeous and richly ornamented apartments equal to one of Indra's palaces, he resembled the moon gliding through the heavens.

CHAPTER 6

The city of Ayodhya is decorated for the proclamation

SHRI VASISHTHA having taken his departure, Shri Ramachandra and the large-eyed Sita purified themselves, and mentally adored the Lord Narayana. Offering salutations to the vessel containing the sacrificial oblation and to propitiate Narayana, Shri Rama poured clarified butter into the sacred fire. Thereafter partaking of the remainder of the offering and praying for what was auspicious, seated on the kusha grass, he meditated on Shri Narayana. Observing silence with purified minds, the prince and princess slept in the temple. Three hours before the dawn, they rose and caused their servants to clean and decorate the palace. Then, after listening to the recitation of the dynastic ballads causing them great delight, they performed their morning

devotions and silently repeated the Gayatri. As the sun rose, clad in silken garments, they saluted Shri Narayana abiding in the golden orb and then instructed the learned brahmins to recite the Peace Chant and other prayers.

The deep and melodious sound of the Peace Chant, recited by the brahmins, mingling with the beat of drums, filled the capital of Ayodhya. The inhabitants of the city, knowing that Rama and Sita were observing a fast and offering devotion to the Lord, were filled with joy.

On the dawning of day, the citizens brought banyan trees, setting them up as pillars to adorn the city for the coming coronation. The high temples resembling the Himalayan peaks, the stately houses, the highways, the crescents and streets, the shops filled with merchandise, the mansions where members of the royal family dwelt, the public assembly halls and the tall trees were all hung with flags of different colours which fluttered in the breeze. Here and there, companies of actors and dancers gave pleasure to the people by singing sweetly and playing melodiously on their instruments. In the market, in the houses, at home and abroad, all spoke only of the coming proclamation of Shri Rama as ruler. Children playing in front of their homes also chattered about this matter.

In honour of the occasion, the roads were strewn with flowers, and rendered fragrant with incense and pleasant odours ; lamps were placed here and there lest the royal procession should pass through at night.

Having decorated the city, the inhabitants awaiting the proclamation, came together in public assemblies or stood on raised tribunes. Praising King Dasaratha, they said : " That mighty King Dasaratha of the dynasty of Ikswaku is indeed a pious man. Realising he has grown old, he, himself, is installing Rama as ruler. How gracious is our king that he is placing us under the rule of Shri Ramachandra. May the Lord long protect the prince as our ruler. Shri Rama is simple, highly learned, devoted to righteousness and affectionate to his brothers. Virtuous and wise, Shri Rama loves us as his own brethren. May the righteous and sinless King Dasaratha live long, by whose grace, we see Rama enthroned to-day."

Hearing the praises of King Dasaratha by the people, those

living far distant were attracted to the holy ceremony and flocked to see the royal procession, filling the city of Ayodha Puri.

On the day of the full moon, the tumult of the multitude was like the roar of the ocean. People coming from far and near to Ayodhya which resembled the city of Amaravati, enhanced the beauty of the capital as aquatic creatures add to the beauty of the sea.

CHAPTER 7

The hunchback maid, Manthara, informs Queen Kaikeyi of Shri Rama's coming installation

AT this time, Queen Kaikeyi had a female servant who had accompanied her from the abode of her royal parent and was ever in attendance on the queen. Her name was Manthara.

By chance, ascending the balcony of the palace which resembled the full moon, she perceived the capital of Ayodhya adorned with garlands of lotuses and the principal streets sprinkled with water. Flags were fluttering from the tops of the tall houses, the roads levelled, and the wide streets crowded with people. Holy brahmins carrying auspicious gifts were waiting to offer them to Shri Ramachandra; the temples were painted white and strains of musical instruments resounded everywhere. Elated by the festivities, joyful crowds were singing the Vedic mantras and not only men but elephants, horses and cattle demonstrated their joy in their own peculiar fashion. Large flags bound with flowers were being carried by joyous citizens wandering here and there.

Manthara was amazed to see these unusual activities and, meeting Shri Rama's royal nurse gaily dressed in a white silken robe, she enquired of her, saying: " Why is the wealthy Queen Kaushalya, mother of Shri Rama, distributing immense riches in charity to-day? Why are the people of the capital so joyous? What is the happy king about to accomplish? "

The royal nurse, overcome with joy at that time, told the

hunchbacked Manthara of Rama's enthronement. She said: "To-morrow, at dawn, under the Pushya star, King Dasaratha will install the sinless Rama, the subduer of anger, as Yuvaraja."

The words of the nurse filled the hunchbacked woman with jealous wrath. Speedily descending from the high palace which resembled Mt. Kailasa, that sinful woman, consumed with malice, entered the bedchamber of Queen Kaikeyi and, waking her, thus addressed her:—

"Why art thou sleeping, O Deluded One? Thou art in imminent peril; art thou blind to future suffering? O Fair One, the good fortune which thou vauntest is about to pass away, like a river that is dried up in the summer season."

Queen Kaikeyi, pained by the bitter words of the sinful hunchbacked maid, answered her saying: "O Manthara, is all well? Why do I behold thee with a gloomy mien, what is the cause of thy distress?"

Hearing the gentle accents of Queen Kaikeyi, Manthara, who was full of cunning, assuming a sorrowful mien and feigning friendship for the queen, spoke bitterly, "O Devi, a great calamity has befallen thee. Hear me! King Dasaratha is about to proclaim Shri Ramachandra as regent. I am immersed in the bottomless sea of fear; I am afflicted with pain and sorrow; I am as if scorched by fire, and for thy good I have come hither. O Kaikeyi, thy woes are my woes, thy sorrows my sorrows, of this I am certain. Hearken! Thou art the daughter of a great royal House and thou art the favourite of King Dasaratha. Why art thou deceived by his crafty ways? Outwardly, thy husband appears to be a speaker of truth, but, inwardly, he is a deceitful man. His speech is fair, but his heart is hard. Thy honesty is the cause of thy suffering. Prevailing on thee by specious words, the king visits thee and speaks insincere words to thee. By delivering the kingdom to Kaushalya's son, he seeks to make her mistress of all. Like an affectionate mother, thou hast nourished in thy lap the enemy that is called thy lord. Thou resemblest the one who pressed a serpent to her bosom deeming it, through illusion, to be her infant. As a snake or an enemy harms the one who has spared him, so has King Dasaratha to-day dealt with thee and thy son.

This sinful, deceitful monarch will destroy thee, thy son and thy relatives, who are worthy of happiness, by enthroning Shri Ramachandra. O Thou of Deluded Intellect, ever indifferent to thine own good, hear me, there is yet time. Whatever thou can'st do for thine own advantage perform and thus protect thy son and me."

Hearing the words of Manthara, the beautiful queen rose from her couch, like the autumnal moon. Filled with wonder and delight, she took from her person a precious ornament and presented it to the hunchback woman.

That lovely one, unequalled in beauty among youthful women, said to Manthara: "O Manthara, thou hast brought me joyful tidings. Tell me, what I can offer thee in return for these pleasing words? I find no difference between Rama and Bharata. I am, therefore, fully satisfied if the king installs Shri Ramachandra. O Dear One, nothing is more pleasing to me than the news of Shri Rama's enthronement. Ask for whatever pleases thee, and I will confer it on thee."

CHAPTER 8

Manthara persuades the queen that Bharata should be regent and Prince Rama banished

PROMPTED by disappointment and anger, Manthara, casting the jewel away, in disdain, cried: "O Foolish Queen, this is no occasion for rejoicing, dost thou know that thou art about to be submerged in a sea of sorrow? I cannot but laugh silently at thy folly. Thou rejoicest when there is reason to mourn! I pity thy simplicity, how should a woman rejoice in the advancement of the son of her enemy? Prince Bharata has an equal right to the kingdom with Ramachandra. Rama fears Prince Bharata and, fearing him, seeks to displace him. Lakshmana, though heir to the throne, is Rama's obedient servant, just as Prince Shatrughna is faithful to Bharata. O Beautiful One, by birth Bharata has a claim to the throne. Traditionally,

the kingdom should be his. Shri Rama is well-versed in affairs of state, and acts promptly in his own interests. Knowing the danger threatening Bharata from Rama, I am filled with dread.

"To-day, Queen Kaushalya is fortunate indeed; her son will be enthroned by the holy brahmins at dawn, when the Pushya star is in the ascendant. Thereafter, thou shalt have to stand in complete submission like a stone, before Queen Kaushalya whose enemies will be subdued. Thus, not only thou, but the virtuous Prince Bharata will become a servant and dependent on the Queen Kaushalya. The women of Shri Rama's household will be filled with joy, but thy daughters-in-law, having no status, will suffer great anxiety and sorrow."

Queen Kaikeyi believing Manthara really to be benevolently disposed to her, began to extol the great virtues of Ramachandra, saying: "Shri Rama instructed by his holy Guru is truly righteous, grateful, truthful and pious; he, the eldest son of the king, assuredly deserves to be made regent. May he live long! He will ever protect his brothers and servants as a father protects his children. O Kubija,[1] why art thou jealous of Rama's coronation? After a hundred years, Bharata will inherit the throne of his illustrious ancestors. Why art thou sad on such a joyful occasion, O Manthara? Shri Ramachandra is as dear to me as is Bharata, he serves me with greater zeal even than he does Queen Kaushalya. If Shri Rama ascends the throne, it is as if Bharata ruled the land; Shri Rama regards his brother as himself."

Hearing the Queen's words, Manthara intensely provoked, sighed deeply and said: "O Stupid One, thou deemest adversity to be prosperity, thou art sinking in an ocean of suffering and yet dost not perceive it. When Rama becomes king, who will succeed him, Prince Bharata or his own son? Prince Bharata will remain without a kingdom forever.

"O Beautiful Princess, all the sons of the king cannot occupy the throne, and if they could, it would bring calamity. Therefore, O Kaikeyi, the sovereign confers his throne on the eldest son; yet, if the younger son be endowed with good qualities he may succeed; the kingdom is given to one and one only. When Rama becomes king, then thy son like an orphan, deprived

[1] Kubija—hunchback.

of all comfort, will be cast forth from the royal dynasty to suffer. I have come to tell thee this for thy good and thou dost not comprehend it. If thou wert wise, thou wouldst not reward me with this jewel on account of the increased prosperity of thy rival. Assuredly when Rama assumes the regency, he will either banish Prince Bharata or have him put to death. Through proximity people acquire affection even for inanimate objects, but thou didst send thy son in his childhood to thy father's house.

"Prince Shatrughna has accompanied Bharata; Lakshmana follows Rama as Shatrughna follows Bharata. It is said that a tree marked down for felling by the dwellers of the forest is preserved by the proximity of the thorny ishika bushes. Thus will Lakshmana ever protect Rama, and Rama in return will preserve Lakshmana. These two brothers love each other as do the Aswins; this is well known. Rama will, therefore, seek to harm Bharata though he will ever protect Lakshmana. I, therefore, consider it were best for Bharata to escape to the forest. If Rama succeed to his father's kingdom, how may thy welfare and that of thy relatives be assured? To thee Bharata is a child worthy of happiness but to Rama he is a rival. When Rama is king, Bharata will not live long. It becomes thee, therefore, O Queen, to protect Prince Bharata, as the leader of a herd of elephants protects it from the lion's spring. Prompted by pride, thou hast in the past slighted Queen Kaushalya; dost thou think she will spare thee when she is chief queen? O Beautiful One, note well when Rama obtains the kingdom together with its mountains, seas and valleys, then thou and thy son, Prince Bharata, will suffer ignominy. Assuredly, when Rama is king, Prince Bharata will be deprived of life, therefore, act so that Rama may be exiled to the forest and Bharata obtain the kingdom."

CHAPTER 9

Queen Kaikeyi is resolved upon her evil design

THE face of Queen Kaikeyi flushed with anger, and sighing deeply, she said to Manthara: " To-day, I shall indeed banish Rama and ensure that Bharata be proclaimed regent. O Manthara, how may Bharata become regent, and Rama be deprived of the kingdom ? "

Hearing these words, the sinful Manthara, bent upon the complete destruction of Shri Rama, said to the queen: " Hear, O Kaikeyi, I will unfold to thee the only course which will lead to the coronation of Prince Bharata. O Kaikeyi, hast thou forgotten that which thou hast often related to me ? O Lover of Poesy, if it be thy desire to hear the tale from my lips, listen and then take action."

Thus addressed, Queen Kaikeyi, rising from her couch, replied: " O Manthara, relate by what means Bharata may acquire the throne and Shri Rama suffer eclipse."

Then the wicked Manthara, desirous of doing injury to Rama, said: " Formerly when thy husband was engaged in a war between the devas and asuras, he supported the cause of Indra. He took thee with him and I accompanied thee. O Kaikeyi, to the south, in the Dandaka forest, there ruled a king named Timidwaja in his capital Bijayanta. He was versed in the magic named Shambara, and he was unconquerable by the gods. He waged war on Indra and in the great conflict the asuras, at night, carried off the wounded from their beds and slew them. King Dasaratha fought great battles with these asuras who pierced his body many times with their weapons. He, falling unconscious, thou, O Devi, brought him from the battlefield and when they still assailed him, didst skilfully preserve him. O Beautiful One, then the king, thy lord, well pleased with thee, proffered thee two boons, and thou didst answer: ' I shall claim them when the need arises.'

" I was not then acquainted with this matter, but thou didst later relate it to me. Prompted by my love for thee, I have

treasured all this in my memory. Now, demand the cessation of preparations for Shri Rama's enthronement. For the first boon ask for the proclamation of Bharata as regent, and for the second the banishment of Rama for fourteen years. During the period of his exile, men will grow to love thy son and his rule will be assured.

"O, Daughter of a Mighty King, entering the chamber of wrath, clad in soiled raiment, cast thyself on the bare ground. On the entrance of the king, neither look at nor speak to him but, rolling on the ground, continue to weep. Doubtless thou art very dear to thy lord who, for thy sake, would enter a raging fire. The king would never provoke thee nor can he bear to see thee weep. He would sacrifice life itself for thy sake. The king cannot be indifferent to thy requests. O Indolent One, test the power of thy beauty to-day; but have a care lest the king offer thee diamonds, pearls, gold and other gems, and be not caught in the snare of greed.

"O Fortunate One, remind the king of the two boons promised to thee on the battlefield; strive hard for the success of thine undertaking. If the king would lift thee up, let him on oath renew his promise. Do thou say to him: 'O Great King, send Rama into exile for fourteen years and make Bharata ruler of the kingdom.'

"Whilst Rama is absent, the rule of Bharata will be established and he will reign forever. O Beautiful One, demand the exile of Rama, from King Dasaratha, and all will be well with thy son. Men will forget their love for Rama and will cease to care for him, and Bharata will have no enemy anywhere. When Shri Rama returns, the supremacy of Bharata will be firmly established; ruling with love, he will inspire affection and many friends will support him. Therefore, O Queen, questioned by the king, fearlessly and firmly demand that the preparations for Rama's enthronement be terminated."

Kaikeyi, thus prevailed upon to execute the evil design of Manthara and fully prepared to comply with it, followed her counsel as a young chicken follows its mother. The beautiful queen, aggrieved that the king had not consulted her concerning this great event, said: "O Manthara, thou art truly my sincere well-wisher! Of all deformed creatures on earth, thou art the

wisest. O Kubija, as yet, I fail to comprehend the king's real intention. Deformed women are usually sinful and perverse, but thou, O Kubija, art unique, resembling a lotus bending to the breeze. In spite of thy physical defect, thou art not to be despised. It would seem that thy slender waist, bashful of thy full rounded bosom, had withdrawn itself. O Manthara, thy face is like the full moon, thou art indeed lovely, thy body is smooth, thy waist decorated with a girdle, thy thighs are long, thy limbs slender. O Manthara, when thou walkest before me, clad in a silken sari, reaching to thy ankles, thou art as graceful as a swan.

"Acquainted with every grace and blandishment, thy hump protruding like the hub of a wheel is surely filled with wisdom, diplomacy and understanding. I, therefore, present thee with a gold chain to adorn it.

" O Lovely Woman, when Bharata becomes king and Rama goes into exile, I will cover thy hump with beaten gold. When I am certain of the success of my undertaking, I will apply sandalwood paste to thy hump, and to thy forehead a diadem of gold and gems.

" O Kubija, I will give thee ornaments of pure gold ; thus attired and adorned thou shalt be free to live as thou pleaseth. Thou shalt put my sister queens to shame and precede them with pride. O Thou whose face is incomparably beautiful, thou art a rival of the full moon. O Deformed One, many hunch-backed women wearing golden ornaments shall attend thee as thy handmaids."

Thus flattered, Manthara reclining on a white couch, glowing like an altar flame, spoke : " O Fortunate One, it is useless to construct a dam when the water has run away, therefore, enter on thine undertaking immediately. Go wait upon the king in the chamber of wrath."

Thus prompted by Kubija, the beautiful-eyed Queen Kaikeyi, filled with ambition, entered the chamber of wrath with Manthara. There, inspired by the hunchbacked woman, casting her pearl necklace of immeasurable value on the ground, the queen rolling on the floor, addressed her : " O Kubija, either Rama shall go into exile and Bharata obtain the kingdom, or King Dasaratha will have news of my death. I shall neither

put on ornaments, nor partake of delicious dishes; if Rama is installed, it shall be the end of my life."

Manthara continued to instruct Kaikeyi in the most cruel manner, uttering words hostile to Rama. "Know well, O Fortunate One, should Rama become ruler, it will mean endless suffering for thee and thy son. Therefore exert thyself to overthrow him."

The queen, wounded by the shafts of Manthara's words, placing both hands on her heart, replied angrily: "O Kubija, either thou shalt bear the news of my death to the king, or Rama shall be exiled and Bharata enthroned. If Rama be not exiled, then I shall neither sleep on a bed nor wear flowing garments, nor apply sandalwood paste nor antimony to my person. Except Bharata be enthroned, I shall neither eat nor drink. If this is not accomplished, I do not desire to live."

Having firmly resolved this, casting her ornaments to the ground, she, herself, lay down like a fallen kinnari.[1] Her face veiled in wrath, her body stripped of its garlands and jewels, the queen resembled the sky bereft of sun and stars.

CHAPTER 10

The king is deeply afflicted at the sight of the weeping queen

INCITED by Manthara, Kaikeyi, like a kinnari, continued to roll on the ground as if wounded by a poisoned arrow. The artful queen, devising a plan, gradually unfolded her design to Manthara. Heaving deep sighs, like a python, Manthara was filled with satisfaction, perceiving her favourite, Kaikeyi, resolved on her evil course of action.

Reflecting on the matter, torn with jealousy, the queen, plucking out her eyebrows, scattered her shining ornaments on the ground adorning it as stars illumine the firmament. Lying thus,

[1] Kinnari—mythical beings, celestial choristers, said to have sprung from the toe of Brahma.

attired in soiled raiment with her hair dishevelled, she resembled a nymph fallen from heaven.

The king, having given his instructions for the installation of Shri Rama, dismissed the court and entered the inner apartments of the queens to inform them of the great occasion.

Anxious to impart the good tidings to his beloved consorts, the illustrious King Dasaratha entered the inner apartment, first going to the beautiful abode of Kaikeyi. As the moon sails into a clear sky after eclipse, so did the king enter the apartment of Queen Kaikeyi. He passed through the garden made beautiful by parrots, peacocks, swans and cranes. Music was softly playing, while dwarfed and hunchbacked maids passed to and fro. There were leafy bowers and alcoves on whose walls were painted beautiful pictures. Everywhere champaka[1] and asoka[2] enhanced the view, whilst other trees were laden with blossom and fruit. Altars of ivory, silver and gold with springs of water flowing by seats inlaid with precious metals and costly jewels, where delicious food and drink was constantly served, transformed the palace into paradise itself.

The king entered the inner apartments, but did not perceive the queen on the couch where desire had caused him to seek her. Calling loudly and receiving no answer, he grew sad; never before had Kaikeyi missed the time of dalliance, never before had the king found the apartment deserted. The monarch desiring to know where the queen was, questioned a maidservant, who replied with fear and submission: "O Sire, she has entered the chamber of wrath."

On hearing these words, the heart of the sovereign was exceedingly troubled. Restless and agitated in mind, the king bowed with sorrow entered the chamber of wrath and found the queen lying on the ground in an unseemly manner. The king who, in his old age, loved the young queen as dearly as his own life, was deeply afflicted at the sight. That sinless monarch beheld the ambitious Kaikeyi lying on the earth like a branch torn from a tree, or a nymph thrust forth from heaven. She lay like an apsara fallen on the earth when her merit is exhausted,

[1] Champaka—magnolia, Michelia champaka.
[2] Asoka—a tree resembling the coconut.

or like a snapped garland, or a doe ensnared by the hunter, or like a young elephant wounded by a poisonous arrow.

Standing over her like an immense tusker, the monarch regarded her with affection. Gently caressing her, apprehensive yet propelled by desire, the king addressed his lotus-eyed queen: "O Devi, I know not why thou art displeased, by whom hast thou been insulted. O tell me! O Auspicious One, I am grieved to see thee lying in the dust, why art thou, ever benevolent towards me, lying on the earth? Thou art as dear to me as my own life, why dost thou act as one possessed by an evil spirit? Art thou sick? If so, I have many eminent physicians who can cure thy malady, who being satisfied with the gifts and honours bestowed on them, are ready to obey my will. In an instant they shall restore thee to health. O Beautiful One, tell me the symptoms of thy complaint. Or dost thou desire to reward or punish any man? Do not let the charm of thy face be marred by grief.

"In order to please thee, I will put to death one who does not deserve the penalty, or will pardon one who merits death. I will reduce a rich man to poverty, or cause a pauper to be made wealthy. I and all those who belong to me are thy obedient servants. I shall never oppose thy will, O Queen. If I can please thee even at the cost of my life, thou hast but to speak. Well dost thou know how much I love thee, now tell me what I may do for thee.

"I swear to accomplish whatever thou desireth. Know me to be monarch of a kingdom on which the sun never sets. The lands of Drivira, Sindhu, Souvira, Sourashtra, Dakshinaputha, Vanga, Anga, Maghandha, Matsha, Kashi and Koshala together with their abundant produce and wealth are ruled by me. If thou desirest any of these, tell me.

"O Frail One, why dost thou cause thyself suffering? Rise, rise, O Dearest, what dost thou fear? O Kaikeyi, as the sun dispels the mist, I will dispel thy fears."

Thus flattered by the king, Kaikeyi appeared somewhat pacified, yet in order to afflict her lord, began to utter bitter and harsh words.

CHAPTER II

She asks for the two boons promised her by the king

THE queen addressed the great sovereign, Dasaratha, who, overcome with desire, was pierced by the shafts of Kama-deva,[1] and said : Neither am I sick nor has any offered me insult. I harbour a certain ambition which thou can'st fulfil. If thou art willing to accomplish this, then give me thy solemn promise and I will make known its purport to thee."

The resplendent monarch, agitated by desire, raising the head of the queen from the ground took her in his arms and answered smilingly : " O Fortunate One, dost thou not know that none is dearer to me than thou, saving that lion among men, Shri Ramachandra. I swear by the invincible Rama, who is even dearer to me than thou, that I will fulfil thy ambition. O Kaikeyi, I swear by Rama, without seeing whom I cannot live one hour, that I will execute thy desire. O Dear One, by my oath I have demonstrated to thee the intensity of my love, now tell me what thou desirest. Knowing the great love I bear for thee, have no fear ; by my meritorious deeds I declare to thee, I will grant thee what thou asketh."

Following the instructions of Manthara, knowing the fulfilment of her ambition to be at hand and concerned with the advancement of Bharata, Kaikeyi spoke harshly. Satisfied with the attitude of the king, she, resembling the dreadful god of death, addressed him : " O Great King, formerly thou didst promise me two boons to which the thirty-three gods were witness. O King, moon, sun, ether, the planets, day and night, the cardinal points, the universe and those who inhabit it, the earth, the gandharvas, the asuras, the spirits and other beings are witness to that promise given to me by thee. O Ye Gods, listen with attention to the boons which the king, a lover of truth, highly resplendent and acquainted with the law of duty, grants me."

The Queen Kaikeyi, praising the king, who was overcome by desire and ready to grant any boon, said : " O King, recollect

[1] Kama or Kandarpa—The God of Love.

how in the war between the gods and asuras, thou didst fall wounded like one dead, and I rescued thee by applying the appropriate means? On thy recovery, thou didst promise me two boons. O Truthful Monarch, I now earnestly desire these two boons which are in thy power to grant. Shouldst thou, despite thy promises given, not fulfil these desires, then I will relinquish my life, dishonoured by thee."

The queen, holding the king's mind subject by her sweet words, resembled a hunter who, intending to slay a deer, lays a snare for it. Then addressing the king infatuated with passion and willing to grant any boon, she said:—

"O Deva, hear me, I now claim these two boons. Employing the preparations made for Rama's installation, let my son Bharata be proclaimed regent, this is the first boon. The second pledge granted me on the battlefield is now also due to be fulfilled. Let Ramachandra be exiled to the forest for fourteen years, wearing a dress of bark, with matted locks like a hermit, while my son, Prince Bharata, rules without hindrance. This is my earnest desire. Let me, this day, behold the exile of Rama. O King, Protector of Truth, preserve thy integrity and the traditions of thy birth. The rishis declare that the observance of truth is the most excellent means of attaining heaven."

CHAPTER 12

The king suffers bitterly at the thought of sending Prince Rama into exile

THE harsh words of Queen Kaikeyi caused intense suffering and agitation to the heart of the king. He began to reflect —"Am I seeing a dream by day, is my mind unhinged, am I possessed by an evil spirit, is an inauspicious star causing me distress or is this disturbance the result of some malady?"

Pondering awhile, the king grew calm, but his mind was still troubled, and, recollecting the demands of Queen Kaikeyi, he

again became restless and agitated like a deer in the presence of a lioness. Heaving deep sighs, seated on the ground, he resembled a highly venomous snake hypnotized by the power of a mantram. He cried out in anger, " Woe unto me " and fell senseless.

After a long time, he recovered consciousness, and suffering great distress, full of wrath, answered Kaikeyi, while his glance seemed as if it would consume her. " O Thou of Evil Disposition, O Destroyer of my Dynasty, what harm have Shri Ramachandra or I done to thee ? Rama has ever treated thee as his own mother. Why hast thou determined thus ? Alas ! I brought thee to my house for the destruction of my home. I deemed thee to be the daughter of a king and thou hast shown thyself to be a venomous serpent. All my people unite in praise of Rama. For what fault shall I abandon him ? It were possible for me to part with Queen Kaushalya, Sumitra, my kingdom, even life itself, but I cannot abandon Shri Rama. To behold the heir-apparent causes delight to my heart ; when not contemplating him, my mind loses its capacity to act. The world may continue to exist without the sun, crops may grow without water, but I cannot live even for a little while without Shri Ramachandra.

" Therefore, O Sinful One, give up thine arrogance. See, I put my head at thy feet, be gracious to me. Why hast thou determined on this cruelty, O Wicked One ? If thou desireth to test my love for Prince Bharata, then do so. When thou didst say betimes that Rama, my eldest son, was entitled to the kingdom on account of his virtues, didst thou utter these words in flattery to gratify me or to exact some service of Rama ?

" The tidings of Rama's installation is causing thee a burning discontent. Possessed by an evil spirit, thou art not thyself, I wean. O Devi, it is a great calamity that the House of Ikshwaku, famed for its probity, should fall into disrepute.

" Hadst thou not been afflicted by an evil spirit or influenced by an inauspicious planet, thou wouldst never have spoken to the detriment of others. It is certain that thou art possessed by a malignant entity. O Child, thou hast often said that thou didst love Shri Ramachandra, even as Bharata himself. O Devi, how dost thou dare to seek the banishment of Ramachandra

for fourteen years? How canst thou demand the exile of the virtuous and tender Ramachandra for fourteen long years? O Thou of beautiful eyes, how canst thou think of sending Rama into exile, who ever honours thee? Rama has paid thee greater respect than Bharata. I fail to comprehend how thou canst desire his exile. Reflect well, none in the world will offer thee greater service, respect and obedience than Rama.

"Among the thousands of women and maid-servants in my private apartments, none ever speaks ill of Rama, and he with a pure heart offers protection to every living being, while his subjects ever love and obey him. He has won the hearts of all beings by protecting the interests of the needy and the afflicted. Generosity, faithful service to his preceptor, valour in the field of battle, skill in archery, have all contributed to his renown. Truth, austerity, friendship, purity, simplicity of life, knowledge of philosophy and service of his teacher are well-known qualities of Shri Ramachandra.

"O Devi, Shri Ramachandra ever acting in the highest interests of all, equal to the maharishis and the gods in enlightenment, must not suffer the ills of exile. Shri Rama has never spoken a harsh word to any, how shall I then, at thy instigation, give him this pitiless message? What shall befall me bereft of Rama who is endowed with forgiveness, gratitude, self-control, renunciation, truth and virtue, and who never inflicts pain on any human being?

"O Kaikeyi, I have grown old and my end is near. In this wretched state I beseech thee to show mercy on me. The earth girdled by the sea, and all that is contained therein, shall be thine. Why dost thou drive me to the brink of death's dark abyss?

"O Kaikeyi, I touch thy feet in supplication. Protect Shri Ramachandra and save me from dishonouring my word."

King Dasaratha, stricken with grief, fell senseless, his whole frame convulsed and agitated. Again and again he entreated the queen to take him beyond the sea of suffering, but that cruel one growing each instant more adamant, replied: "O King, if thou repent of the two boons given to me, none in the world will call thee righteous. When other kings question thee regarding thy promises, O Righteous One, what will be

thine answer? Wilt thou say that she to whom thou owest thy life and by whose grace thou yet livest, who rendered thee great service at the time of misfortune and to whom thou didst promise two boons, has now been refused these blessings?

"Assuredly thou shalt become a stigma on the illustrious dynasty of Ikshwaku, having given promises from which thou now wouldst fain withdraw. Recollect King Shivya, who gave the flesh of his own body, to redeem a pledge, was of thy royal house. King Alarka, likewise of thy dynasty, plucked out his eyes that the sight of an aged and learned brahmin might be restored, and thus obtained the highest state. Not only man is bound by his word, the ocean whose boundaries are fixed, does not pass beyond the shore. Therefore, recollecting thy pledge, do not relinquish it. O King, art thou bereft of thy senses? Abandoning truth, thou wouldst grant Rama the kingdom so that thou mayest enjoy the embraces of Queen Kaushalya. Be it in accord with dharma or not, be it truth or falsehood, thou must fulfil the promise made to me, it shall never be revoked.

"Shouldst thou withdraw thy pledge and grant Ramachandra the kingdom, I will give up my life by drinking deadly poison. Were I to see Queen Kaushalya receiving salutations as chief queen, I should not be able to endure it.

"O Great Sovereign, I swear by Bharata and my own life that nothing save the exile of Rama shall satisfy me."

After speaking these words, Kaikeyi became silent, disregarding the supplications of the afflicted monarch. Understanding the full portent of the harsh words of Kaikeyi, implying Rama's exile and the rulership of Bharata, the king remained silent for a long time. His senses numbed, he gazed steadfastly at the face of his beloved queen, speaking thus bitterly.

Maharajah Dasaratha, afflicted on hearing the threatening speech of Kaikeyi resembling a thunderbolt, inspiring pain and grief, knowing she had resolved to banish Rama, cried out: "O Rama! Rama!" and heaving deep sighs fell to the earth like a felled tree. Like a madman bereft of sense or as one in delirium or a snake hypnotized by incantations, he fell, deprived of his glory. In abject tones, he addressed Kaikeyi, saying: "Who has instructed thee in this evil design, cloaked in specious

garb? Art thou not ashamed to address me as one possessed? Formerly, I did not deem thee capable of such conduct; in youth, thy disposition was otherwise. What has overpowered thee that thou seekest such a boon? Stay these unjust words that Rama should go to the forest and Bharata occupy the throne. O Sinful One, O Cruel-hearted One, O Evil Doer, relinquish the insistence on thy resolve, for thine own sake and for the sake of thy subjects and thy son. Either Rama or I must have offended thee. How have we done so, that thou speakest thus? Assuredly Prince Bharata will never wish to occupy the throne while Rama lives. I deem Bharata no less virtuous than Ramachandra. When instructing Rama to go to the forest, seeing him stricken, how can I look on him? How can I look upon his face darkened like the moon in eclipse? How can I revoke that decision made in consultation with my ministers and friends desiring my welfare, causing confusion, as the sudden smiting of an army by the enemy. What will the kings of other lands say when they hear the breaking of my resolve which was reached by common consent? Will they not say: 'King Dasaratha of the House of Ikshwaku is like a child. We marvel that he has ruled so long.' When the aged, wise and learned brahmins enquire for Rama, shall I answer them that, coerced by Kaikeyi, I have sent him into exile? If I say this in truth, it will be accounted falsehood since I have already instructed my Guru to install Shri Rama as regent. What will his mother, Queen Kaushalya, say, if I banish Rama? How shall I explain this cruel deed to Queen Kaushalya? She is ever dutiful, a friend, serving me as a handmaid, keeping my secrets as a trusted companion, practising virtue like a woman and in attending on my welfare resembling a sister, serving me with delicious food like a mother, ever speaking sweetly to me, ever desiring my good; her son is dearest to me. How can I fail to accord her due respect? Fearing thy displeasure, how great would be my subsequent repentance and remorse?

"As one partaking of delicious food, really injurious to him, is later filled with regret, so knowing Rama exiled at my command, the terrified Sumitra will place no further faith in me. Oh! how unfortunate is this, that Sita hearing these evil

tidings of my death and Shri Ramachandra's banishment, will yield up her life, as a nymph dies deprived of her mate in a Himalayan valley.

" I shall not long survive the exile of Rama and the grief of Sita. Enjoy thou the kingdom with thy son, but as a widow! Know well, O Devi, there is no happiness for me in life if Rama is exiled. As men infatuated by the colour of wine, drink it thinking ill of it the while and knowing its harmful consequences, so did I, charmed by thee, enter into union with thee, believing thee true and faithful. Yet now I know thy disposition to be incomparably vile. Thou hast deluded me with alluring deceits.

"As a hunter decoys a deer by sweet music, so alas! will the people of the capital think of me, as my son's executioner. They will shrink from me as from a brahmin who drinks intoxicating liquor. Alas! that I should hear such bitter words. Now I am suffering deep affliction as men who consume the fruit of their former iniquities. O Sinful One, having long protected thee, it is I who have erred, like the man who carefully preserves the rope with which he is eventually hanged.

"As a child, in a solitary place, plays with a black snake not knowing it will be the cause of his death, so am I. Who is more wicked than myself, who, during my lifetime causes my saintly son to become an orphan? The whole world will despise me saying: 'King Dasaratha is overcome by lust and at the prompting of a woman has sent his son into exile.'

" Shri Rama in his childhood abstained from flesh, honey[1] and wine, and faithful to his brahmacharya vow, was reduced to a skeleton by the observance of severe austerities, much study and the firm service of his preceptor. Now, a householder, the time has come that he should enjoy health and prosperity, yet now he is condemned to undergo great physical privation. It is certain when I command him to go to the forest, he will reply 'Be it so, O Sire'. Alas! how much better if it could be otherwise. My beloved child will assuredly not disobey me. Not knowing my true reason, and believing the command to spring from the sincerity of my heart, he will acquiesce and

[1] Honey in those days being obtained by killing all the bees, hence Shri Rama eschewed it.

willingly depart; yet all will execrate me if Rama leaves us.

"Death, who spares none, will take me to the region of Yama while Shri Ramachandra has gone to the forest, then O Kaikeyi, what grievous injustice wilt thou inflict on thy remaining relatives and Queen Kaushalya? She, deprived of Rama and Lakshmana, will no longer be able to endure her grief and will yield up her life.

"O Kaikeyi, having cast me, Kaushalya, Sumitra and my three sons into the pit of death, canst thou be happy? Wilt thou be able to protect the dynasty of Ikshwaku, which for long ages has been ruled without disturbance, when Rama and I are gone? Will Bharata approve the banishment of Rama, if it be so, let him not perform my obsequies. O Enemy, may thine ambitions be fulfilled. When I am dead and Rama banished, then wilt thou, a widow, govern the kingdom with thy son.

"O Thou dwelling in our midst as the pretended daughter of a king, wert thou truly a princess, thine incomparable renown would not have been tarnished, nor would I have been set at nought by thee.

"Now my son, accustomed to ride on chariots, horses and elephants will have to walk barefoot in the forest. He, who formerly was served at table by attendants in jewelled livery, each vying with the other, saying: 'My dish is sweeter, O Lord,' how shall that Rama henceforth live on the bitter and insipid fruits of the forest? How shall he pass his life dependent on fruit and roots? How shall Shri Ramachandra, accustomed to costly apparel and a luxurious couch, sleep on the bare ground, clothed in the yellow robe of a mendicant? I know not why an evil-minded woman should issue this cruel decree that Rama should be exiled and Bharata be installed as regent.

"Woe unto those women seeking material gain, skilful in accomplishing their own purpose! I do not condemn all women, but those like the mother of Bharata. O Kaikeyi, versed in wrong doing, ever meanly disposed and seeking thine own advantage, didst thou enter my house to cause me affliction? What fault hast thou seen in me or in Ramachandra, the friend of all the world? O Kaikeyi, on seeing Rama suffering in the

forest at thy request, fathers will abandon their sons, faithful wives their husbands, and the whole world will condemn thee.

" When I behold Shri Ramachandra adorned and handsome as a god, approaching me, my eyes are delighted ; seeing him thus, I am filled with joy and courage. The affairs of the world may continue in the absence of the dawn, and the earth exist without rain, evoked by Indra, but none in the capital will enjoy happiness beholding Rama going into exile.

"Alas ! To-day, I am about to perish for long nursing thee in my arms, O Kaikeyi, a venomous snake bent on my destruction. Thou art my real enemy. Now do thou, Rama and Lakshmana perform my funeral ceremonies, then govern the kingdom with thy son, Bharata. Destroy my relatives and friends, depopulate my towns and country, and live in accord with mine enemies, O Thou Cruel Wretch ! Why do thy teeth not break into a thousand fragments, seeing thou hast spoken improperly before thy lord, and uttered vain boasts. Never did my Rama speak an unkind word to thee. He knows not how to speak unkindly. Thou chargest Rama with baseness, who ever was of gentle speech and who is endowed with every excellent quality.

" O Thou Defamer of the Kingdom of Kaikeya, I shall not grant thy request whether thou be angered or sorrowful or takest thy life by swallowing poison or dasheth thy head against a rock, or even sinkest into the earth. Thou utterest words keen as the edge of a razor, deceitful and heartrending, veiling them in gentle accents, thy nature is perverse, thou art the destroyer of thine own family. Thou hast inflicted bitter agony on me. Though charming in looks, thou art a dangerous woman. I do not desire to consort with one so surpassingly wicked.

" What use to speak of love and joy, I cannot live without Ramachandra. O Devi, abstain from destroying me. I touch thy feet, be gracious to me."

Finding her heart unmoved by his appeal, King Dasaratha like an orphan, fawning and abject, fell unconscious at the feet of Kaikeyi as one about to die.

CHAPTER 13

Kaikeyi disregards the king's immeasurable distress

KING DASARATHA lying on the ground in utter ignominy, resembled King Yayati fallen from heaven. The cruel queen, seeing her purpose yet unaccomplished, herself fearless yet inspiring terror in the heart of the king, again demanded the boons, saying :—

" O King, thou didst ever deem thyself a man of truth and one faithful to his vows, why dost thou then withhold the boons promised to me ? "

After some time, the monarch exceedingly disquieted, replied in anger :—

" O Sinful Woman, after my death when Ramachandra, the chief of men, has gone into exile, thou mayest accomplish thy purpose. In heaven, the gods will enquire concerning the welfare of Shri Ramachandra. If I reply that I have sent Rama into exile to please Kaikeyi, it will be looked upon as a falsehood, and none will believe it. Having passed innumerable years without a son, how should I, after long suffering and anxiety, being blessed with an heir, forsake the long-armed Rama ?

" How can Rama, valorous, learned, tolerant and forbearing, whose eyes are like lotuses, be driven into exile by me ? How should I send the beautiful Rama, whose complexion is like the blue lotus, to the Dandaka forest ? Shri Rama, meriting every comfort and pleasure, undeserving of sorrow, how can I behold that wise Ramachandra in distress ?

" Had I died without seeing Rama afflicted, who merits no suffering whatsoever, my spirit would have experienced joy in heaven. O Pitiless, O Sinful Kaikeyi, why, why dost thou compel me to send my dear and truthful son, Shri Ramachandra, to the forest ? I shall incur dishonour throughout the whole world."

Thus lamenting and distracted, evening having fallen and the night creeping on apace, King Dasaratha afflicted and in great anguish, experienced no delight on beholding the moon.

The old king, sighing heavily, continued to lament, and gazing at the starry sky cried: "O Night, adorned with stars, do not pass into the dawn. O Auspicious Night, with great humility, I supplicate thee, have pity on me and do not pass away. I have no desire to behold the face of this cruel Kaikeyi, who has caused me immeasurable distress."

Then the monarch again entreated Kaikeyi saying: "A virtuous man and yet wretched, I take refuge in thee, for I have only a short while to live. O Auspicious One! Know this; I am a king and not alone but in the royal assembly have I proclaimed Rama as regent. Be gracious unto me, O Kaikeyi, O Child, O Giver of Delight! Grant imperishable rulership to Shri Ramachandra and endear thyself to me. O Kaikeyi, thus shalt thou obtain great renown.

"O Thou of beautiful face, let Rama be installed, so shalt thou cause pleasure to Shri Ramachandra, to Bharata, to the court, nay to the whole world."

Then the pure-hearted sovereign, his eyes reddened in his distress burst into a flood of tears, but the wicked Kaikeyi disregarded both his flattery and his weeping.

The king, realising the exile of Shri Rama could not be avoided, fell senseless to the earth. Sighing deeply at every moment, King Dasaratha passed the night in great anguish.

At dawn, the royal musicians striking up to awaken the great monarch, were ordered by him to be silent.

CHAPTER 14

The king is overcome by grief; the queen summons Shri Rama

KAIKEYI beholding the king distracted with suffering, undecided how to act, and restless as a fish on dry land, said:—

"O King, what is the meaning of thy grief and sorrow? Having promised me two boons, wilt thou incur the sin of default? Those versed in the secret of righteousness, call truth the essence of virtue. I ask thee but to protect truth for thine

own good. O King, in ancient times, thy forbear, King Shivya fulfilled a promise given, by yielding up his body to a hawk and thus acquired a high spiritual state. Thus also the illustrious Alarka gladly taking out his own eyes gave them to a blind brahmin versed in the Veda. The Lord of Waters, the ocean, paying due regard to truth, does not pass beyond its boundaries at the time of the full moon. Truth is Brahman. Truth is the crown of righteousness. The imperishable Veda proclaims the glory of truth. When the heart is purified by the practice of truth, Brahman is realised. O King, if thou holdest truth to be the fruit of virtue, then following truth grant me the two boons, O Bestower of Boons. For the sake of safeguarding thy future happiness, send Rama into exile! Send Rama into exile at my request. Thrice I repeat my desire. If thou failest to exile Rama, I shall not survive the dishonour and shall yield up my life in thy presence."

Hearing the words of Kaikeyi, King Dasaratha found himself bound and unable to escape, like King Bali of old in the presence of Vamana.[1] Distraught, his mind agitated, his countenance pallid, the king resembled a bullock tottering between the yoke and the wheel. Anxiety and grief overwhelmed the king; with a supreme effort, mustering his courage and controlling his senses, his eyes distended, he addressed Kaikeyi; "O Sinful Woman, at the time of our nuptials, in the presence of the sacred flame, I took thy hand in mine, but to-day, I reject thee and the son born of thee, Prince Bharata. O Devi, the night is nearly passed and the sun about to rise. My Guru and the elders will urge me to perform the installation ceremony. Let the preparations made for the installation be used for my funeral rites. Let no part therein be taken by thee, O Kaikeyi, as thou dost oppose the installation of Shri Rama. How shall I look upon the faces of these people now filled with joy in anticipation of Rama's enthronement, that will soon become overcast and melancholy?"

The night illumined by the moon and stars passed away as the King was speaking, and day dawned. Then Kaikeyi, eloquent in speech but full of iniquity, transported with anger, spoke passionately:—

[1] Vamana—The holy Dwarf, a divine Incarnation.

" O King, why dost thou speak like one affected by a grave disease? Send for thy son Ramachandra to come hither. Install my son on the throne and send Rama into exile. Then shalt thou have accomplished thy duty."

The king, like a well-bred horse smarting under the lash, replied: " I am caught in the net of dharma, I am bereft of understanding, let me behold my eldest son, Shri Rama."

The morning had now dawned, and the night had fled; the sun had risen and an auspicious planet was in the ascendant. The blessed Lord Vasishtha endowed with every excellent quality, surrounded by his disciples, holding the sacred articles required for the installation, came to the great door. Passing through the capital, Shri Vasishtha observed the streets swept and watered. Flags were fluttering everywhere in the breeze, flowers of many kinds were strewn on the roads and garlands hung here and there. All the inhabitants looked happy; shops and stalls displayed a variety of merchandise, while incense mixed with ambergris and sandalwood perfumed the air. Everywhere people were celebrating the festival and eagerly awaiting the coronation of Ramachandra.

Having passed through the city of Ayodhya, which resembled Amaravati, Shri Vasishtha came to the royal palace, and beheld at the gate an assembly of brahmins and teachers who enhanced the scene. Innumerable priests, skilled in the ritual of sacrifice, courtiers and leaders of the warrior class, as well as merchants were gathered there. Shri Vasishtha penetrated to the private apartments and delightedly entered there. At the door he beheld the charioteer Sumantra of pleasing looks and the holy sage begged him to announce his arrival to the king and inform his majesty that he had brought the sacred water of the Gunga in golden vessels, and various seeds, fragrant herbs and gems of different kinds. There was also honey, curds, clarified butter, parched rice, kusha grass, flowers and milk, together with eight beautiful virgins and a white elephant. A chariot drawn by four horses, an excellent sword and bow, a palanquin with bearers and a canopy resembling the moon in purity. Two white chamaras, a narrow-necked jar of gold, white heifers, a lion with great teeth, a fine steed, a lion throne, a tiger skin, sacrificial fuel and fire. Musicians of every kind, beautifully

adorned women singers, teachers, priests, cows, deer and birds; representatives of the people and merchants with their families were gathered there. These and many people inspired by affection and of gentle speech, had come with their leaders to see the coronation of Rama.

Shri Vasishtha ordered Sumantra to inform the king with all haste that Rama should be installed when the Pushya star was in the ascendant. Sumantra instructed by the royal Sage Vasishtha, and having access to the person of the king, entered the palace crying " Jai! Jai! to his majesty ". The guards permitted him to enter without hindrance, and Sumantra, approaching the king, ignorant of his condition, began to praise his royal master, according to the prevailing custom. With great humility he addressed him, saying: " O Gracious Sovereign, as the sun at the breaking of day gives pleasure to the sea, so do thou give us joy by thy radiant countenance. Add to our delight, O Mighty Lord! As in the morning Indra was adored by his charioteer, whereafter he defeated the asuras, so do I salute thee. I come to wake thee as the Vidyas and Vedas waken Brahma. As sun and moon stimulate the earth which supports all men and life, so do I come to waken thee, O Great Ruler. Awake, O Maharaj and rejoice the hearts of the people by thy sight. Don thy royal robes and adorn thyself with the great gems, resplendent like the sun on the crest of Mount Meru. O Sire, may the Moon, the Sun, Shiva and Kuvera be auspicious to thee. May Varuna, Agni and Indra grant thee success. The lovely night has passed and the auspicious day has dawned. O Royal Sage, arise and perform thy duties; preparations for the installation of Rama are completed, the leading citizens and the inhabitants of the capital are waiting in reverence at the gate; the blessed Sage Vasishtha, with his disciples, is at the door. Command us, O King, to inaugurate the coronation of Rama immediately; as cattle without a keeper, an army without a general, night without the moon, cows without a bull, so is thy kingdom without a king to-day."

The king hearing the peaceful words of Sumantra was once more submerged in the sea of sorrow; though overcome with grief, his eyes red with wrath, he answered him:

"O Sumantra, thy words of praise inflict great pain on me."

Sumantra, beholding the miserable condition of his master, and hearing his anguished words, joining his palms in submission, stepped backwards, tongue-tied.

Then Kaikeyi, skilled in achieving her own purpose, addressed Sumantra: "O Sumantra, being overjoyed on account of the installation of his son, the king has not slept this night. Being fatigued, he is now overcome with sleep. Go thou, therefore, and bring the illustrious Ramachandra hither; this matter requires no deliberation."

Sumantra reflected that the arrival of Shri Ramachandra would pacify the mind of the king: he speedily went to summon him and on the way reflected, "Why has Queen Kaikeyi summoned Rama in haste?" The charioteer believed the eagerness of the king had prompted him to summon Shri Ramachandra for the purpose of his installation. Sumantra, happily came to the beautiful palace of Shri Rama which resembled a small island in the sea, and beheld there many people standing at the gate.

He beheld many kings and great chieftains assembled in their allotted places.

CHAPTER 15

Sumantra hurries to Prince Rama's palace

WHEN night had given way to the dawn, brahmins well-versed in the Veda, together with the king's priests, came to the palace gate. With them came the counsellors, the chiefs of the army and leading merchants to witness the installation of Rama.

The sun having risen and the Pushya planet with Karrata[1] being auspicious,[2] it being the time at which Rama was born, brahmins brought vessels of gold filled with water, a finely

[1] Cancer.
[2] In the right conjunction astrologically.

decorated throne and a resplendent chariot with a seat spread with a tiger skin. Water was brought from the confluence of the Gunga and Yamuna and from the holy rivers, lakes and wells, from the westward flowing streams and those descending from great heights and flowing through the plains. From the seas also water was provided and stored in shining vessels of gold and silver, wherein lotus blooms floated and on whose surface sticks of Gular[1] and banyan were sprinkled.

Honey, curds, clarified butter, kusha grass, and flowers were also provided. Beautifully adorned singing women were likewise present. Chamaras with handles of gold set with jewels, a beautiful canopy, scintillating and round as the moon, were furnished for the ceremony, also a white caparisoned steed, a young elephant of great size, and eight virgins gracefully attired.

Musicians with vinas, bards and those who proclaim the king's praise; everything required for the installation of a sovereign of the dynasty of Ikshwaku was furnished by command of the king. Not beholding King Dasaratha at the appointed time, those present said: "Who will announce our arrival to the monarch? The sun has risen, but the king has not come forth; every preparation for the installation of Rama is now complete."

While they were thus speaking, Sumantra, honoured servant of the state, addressed the royal guests, and maharajahs, saying: "As commanded by the king, I purpose to bring Shri Rama before him. On my return, I will ask his majesty for you who are worthy of honour, the reason for the delay."

The aged Sumantra came to the door of the inner apartment and entered, unannounced. Praising the royal dynasty of Raghu, he reached the chamber where the king was lying on the ground. Pouring forth his praise, he approached the arras hanging before the king's chamber, and said: "O Sovereign, may Surya, Kuvera, Varuna, Agni and Indra grant thee victory. The Goddess Night, has departed, dawn has come, arise O Lion among Kings! Brahmins, ambassadors and chiefs of the forces have assembled and are desirous of seeing thee."

The king, rousing himself, said to his chief minister, Sumantra: "Bring Shri Ramachandra hither speedily. Why dost

[1] Gular—Twigs of a fragrant resinous tree.

thou delay? I do not sleep, go bring Shri Rama with all haste."

Sumantra, bowing to the king, went forth to execute his commands. Thinking the installation of Rama to be near, he set out for the palace, passing joyfully along the royal route gay with flags and banners. Hearing on all sides, people conversing of the coming event, he mingled with the happy throng and after walking some distance, saw Shri Rama's palace, white as the peak of Mount Kailasha and fair as Indra's abode.

The turrets, adorned with golden images, studded with coral and jewels, rendered the palace resplendent, like the winter clouds on the caverns of Mount Sumeru. The main gateway, decorated with wreaths of gems and pearls, was fragrant with sandalwood and ambergris, sweet-scented like the Malaygiri mountain and abounding with cranes and peacocks. The doors and walls of the inner apartments were decorated with paintings of lions, tigers and wolves, pleasing to the eye and mind.

The palace of Rama, resplendent as the sun and moon, furnished like the palace of Kuvera and equalling the abode of Indra, was surrounded by many kinds of birds who sported there. Men from distant lands in bejewelled apparel waited bearing gifts in their hands, eager to behold Rama. The spacious palace was sumptuously furnished and the attendants serving there were men of small stature.

Shri Sumantra, delighting the people, in his chariot drawn by horses, came to the door of the palace which was filled with untold wealth and surrounded by deer and peacocks gladdening the heart.

Entering the gates and greeting those dear to Rama, Sumantra reached the door of the inner apartment. There also he heard everyone conversing of Shri Rama and he rejoiced to hear them speaking of his glory. He beheld the inner inclosure, resplendent and lofty as Mount Meru, which was rendered charming by the presence of many deer and birds. There, too, he beheld those from various lands, descending from their chariots, bearing gifts.

He observed an elephant equal to a hill in height, resembling a dark cloud, who had never known the touch of a goad and

whose forehead was dripping with sweat. Its name was Shatrunja, and it stood prepared to carry Rama. •

Proceeding further, Sumantra beheld many charioteers and horsemen ready with their caparisoned horses. Continuing on his way, Shri Rama's chief minister saw countless artists and poets gathered there.

Passing through the multitude, he came to the private apartment of Shri Rama. Unchallenged, the great Sumantra, resembling a cloud, entered the apartment as a crocodile enters the gem-filled ocean.

CHAPTER 16

Shri Rama in his chariot drives swiftly to the king

PASSING through a further doorway, thronged with people, Sumantra came to another gate where no guard stood. He beheld there many young men, alert, vigilant, and devoted to their master, armed with bows and axes, and wearing beautiful ear-rings. Beyond these, Sumantra saw aged men, clad in red, gorgeously attired, holding staves in their hands, guarding the apartments of the Queens. Seeing the virtuous Sumantra approaching with others, they stood respectfully at attention.

Sumantra, addressing these humble and experienced attendants, said: "Be pleased to inform Shri Ramachandra that Sumantra waits at the door."

They, ever desiring the good of Rama, informed the prince and Sita of the arrival of Sumantra. Knowing Sumantra to be in the confidence of his royal father, Shri Rama affectionately caused him to be summoned.

The charioteer, entering there, perceived Shri Ramachandra resembling Kuvera himself, seated on a golden couch, spread with soft cushions and richly ornamented. His brow was anointed with pure and fragrant sandalwood-paste, the colour of the blood of a wild boar.

By his side the Princess Sita, as beautiful as the moon attended

by the Chitra[1] planet, was seated, holding a chamara in her hand.

Sumantra, versed in the customs of the court, offered respectful salutations to Shri Rama who appeared as resplendent as the noonday sun. With joined palms, Sumantra humbly enquired as to the prince's welfare and addressed him who was thus seated on the couch, saying: " O Excellent Son of Queen Kaushalya, the king desires to see thee in the apartment of Queen Kaikeyi, be pleased to go thither without delay."

Thus addressed, that Lion among men, the most illustrious Ramachandra, filled with joy, on receiving the summons, replied: " Be it so, I will go thither with all speed." Then turning to Sita, he said: " O Devi, my mother Kaikeyi, and my father have consulted each other concerning those matters relative to my installation. O Princess of Beautiful Eyes, my mother Kaikeyi, ever benevolent and accomplished, knowing the king's desire, is influencing him for my good! That daughter of the great King of Kaikeya, ever obedient to my royal father desires my welfare. He, with his beloved queen, has sent for me through Sumantra, who is ever well-disposed to me, and desires what is pleasing to me, as does the king, my sire, and the queen, my mother. Assuredly, to-day the king will proclaim me regent. I shall go to my royal father in all haste, do thou converse happily with thy maids of honour."

Hearing these courteous words, spoken by her lord, the lotus-eyed Princess Sita reciting the Peace Chant, followed Shri Ramachandra to the door. She said: " O Maharaj, the kingdom has many learned brahmins who will crown thee, as Indra was crowned by Brahma. When the preliminary initiation is completed and thou dost perform the Rajasuya[2] sacrifice and I behold thee dressed in an antelope skin with the deer's horns in thy hand, do thou then allow me to pay thee homage. May Indra in the east protect thee, may Yama in the south protect thee, may Varuna in the west protect thee, may Kuvera in the north protect thee."

Having taken leave of Sita, Shri Rama left his palace with Sumantra. Shri Rama, going forth from his palace, as a lion

[1] Chitra—Spica virginis.
[2] Rajasuya sacrifice—a great sacrifice performed at a king's installation.

issues from his cave, beheld Shri Lakshmana humbly waiting at the door.

At the middle gate, Shri Rama encountered his friends and honoured those who had gathered there to witness his coronation. Then that Lion among men, the son of King Dasaratha, mounted his chariot resplendent as flame, spread with tiger skins and which, on its course, made a noise like thunder. Inlaid with gold and gems, it dazzled the beholders as does the brightness of the sun. The horses yoked to the chariot, equalling young elephants, galloped as swiftly as the steeds of Indra.

Shri Rama, seated in his resplendent chariot moving rapidly with a sound as of thunder issuing from the clouds, appeared like the moon coursing in the heavens. His younger brother, Prince Lakshmana attended him standing behind him in the chariot, with a chamara in his hand.

On every side, shouts of "Jai! Jai!" arose, while the multitude followed Shri Rama's chariot with its cavalcade of mounted horsemen and mountain-like elephants. Warriors whose brows were anointed with sandalwood paste and ambergris, preceded the royal chariot bearing naked swords in their hands. Then followed the musicians and bards singing their praises and the shouts of warriors resembling the roaring of lions. The chariot went forward amid a rain of flowers showered down from the balconies and windows by beautifully adorned women, of faultless limbs, who thus offered salutations to Rama and desirous of his welfare chanted hymns of adoration, saying: "O Delight of Thy Mother, whose heart to-day is raised in exultation because of thee; to-day thy royal mother will see thee in possession of the throne.

"The Princess Sita, exceedingly dear to Rama is esteemed the most fortunate woman in the world by womankind who, believing her to have practised a high degree of virtue and ascetism in a previous birth, say, "As the planet Rohini[1] found union with the moon, so has the Princess Sita found union with Rama."

Hearing the delightful eulogies of the women, Raghava pressed on, listening to the converse of the citizens and those come from afar, concerning his approaching coronation. Some

[1] Rohini—fourth of the lunar asterisms.

said: " To-day, Shri Ramachandra, our lord, will acquire limitless wealth and power through the favour of his royal sire. Those people over whom he holds sway, will obtain their heart's desire and the fulfilment of their ambitions. Should he enjoy the kingdom for long, it will be our gain, since no distress will visit the kingdom while he is king."

Thus preceded by neighing horses and the praises of his dynasty sung by chroniclers and bards, Rama advanced like the god Kuvera, while on every side he beheld the decorated highways filled with male and female elephants, chariots, horses and people and stalls overflowing with gems and merchandise.

CHAPTER 17

He advances to the palace amidst the plaudits of his friends

SEATED in his chariot, the prince beheld his delighted friends and the city, white as a cloud, adorned with flags and banners fluttering here and there, fragrant with the perfume of incense, filled with a multitude of men and enriched by stately buildings. Passing through the scented highways where heaps of sandalwood were burning, and rare perfumes, wool and silken cloths, unpierced pearls, and innumerable gems being exposed to view, with stalls replete with articles of food and drink and merchandise of every kind, he beheld the royal highway adorned like the pathway of the gods in heaven, with every auspicious mark, such as curds, rice, sandalwood, parched grain and milk. Traversing the cross-roads gay with flowers and fragrant objects, amidst the blessings and salutations of his friends, he acknowledged their praise with humility. Those advanced in years, were crying: " O Prince, thou who art to be crowned to-day, let thy rule resemble thy grandfather's and thy great grandfather's, thus shall we prosper as in the days of thine ancestors, may our happiness exceed even those times. Neither do we require the comforts of this world, nor those of the other world. Beholding Shri Ramachandra returning after his coronation,

our delight will exceed all else. Nothing is dearer to us than the installation of Shri Ramachandra of limitless glory."

Thus did Raghava advance, amidst the eulogies of his friends the focus of every eye and heart, serene and imperturbable. Those who were unable to behold him or were unnoticed by him, became objects of contempt to others, nay, they were a reproach to themselves. The all-compassionate Ramachandra looked on each of the four castes with equal condescension. Each loved him according to his capacity.

Passing the temples, the sacred groves and pavilions, Shri Ramachandra circumambulated them in reverence. He now beheld the royal palace, resembling a white cloud, its towers like the snow-capped peaks of Mount Kailasa, its balconies seeming almost to reach the skies like the fire chariots of the gods; the pleasure houses set with precious gems, caused the whole palace to excel all those on earth and rival even the abode of Indra.

Approaching his father's palace, Shri Rama passed through the three gateways guarded by archers, and proceeded on foot through the fourth and fifth enclosures. There, leaving his attendants, he entered the private apartments of the king.

The multitude seeing Rama enter the palace were filled with joy and awaited his coming forth as the sea awaits the coming of the full moon.

CHAPTER 18

He sees the king full of anguish and speechless; Kaikeyi utters the cruel words

ENTERING the private apartment, Shri Ramachandra beheld King Dasaratha full of distress, his countenance pale, seated with Kaikeyi on the royal couch. First placing his head at the feet of his royal sire, he then respectfully offered salutations to Mother Kaikeyi.

The king, his eyes filled with tears, his throat choked with

emotion, could only utter the word " Rama " and nothing more. As the heart of a man who accidentally touches a serpent is filled with fear, so was the heart of Rama on beholding the king's misery. The king agitated by grief and remorse, sighing bitterly, filled with anguish, resembled the ocean which, calm by nature, is agitated by a mighty storm, or Rahu[1] causing the sun's eclipse, or the soul of a sage stirred by the utterance of falsehoods. Without knowing the cause of the king's distress, Shri Rama became agitated like the sea on the day of the full moon. Shri Ramachandra, ever engaged in seeking his father's welfare, reflected: " Why is my father not happy to see me to-day? Formerly, when displeased, on beholding me he was pacified, but to-day, beholding me, he is troubled. Why is he overcome with grief and bereft of his glory? "

Making obeisance to Kaikeyi, he said: " If by an involuntary offence, I have caused my father displeasure, then O Mother, propitiate him for me. Erstwhile, even when displeased, my father showed favour to me, but to-day, I behold him pale of countenance, and deeply distressed, nor does he speak to me. Is my revered father suffering any physical or mental distress? It is rare indeed for a man to be consistently happy. Has his majesty seen any grievous fault in the amiable Prince Bharata or the valorous Shatrughna, or in my mothers or in me? I do not desire to live a single instant if his majesty is not satisfied with me, or is displeased or if I have disobeyed him. Why should not man obey his parents, who are the source of his birth and who are living gods? Hast thou spoken harsh words, in vanity, to the king, on hearing which his heart is lacerated? O Devi, answer my question truly. Tell me the cause of this unprecedented grief in my sire."

Kaikeyi thus addressed by Shri Rama, dead to all shame and skilful in defence of her selfish purpose, spoke arrogantly: " O Rama, the king is not angry nor is he suffering physical pain, he has something on his mind which he fears to disclose to thee. He loves thee dearly and so hesitates to tell thee this unpleasant matter. It is for thee to fulfil what he has promised to me and to act in accordance with it. Having formerly granted

[1] Rahu—a mythical demon, said to cause the eclipse of the sun and moon by swallowing it.

me a boon, he now repents it like a common man. To promise a boon and then seek to evade it, is like the setting up of a dam when the water has gone. O Rama, have a care lest the king abandon truth for thy sake. Among holy men, truth is said to be the root of dharma. Should the king command thee and thou fulfil his command without further deliberation, then will I reveal the whole truth to thee. The king may not communicate with thee directly, therefore, be ready to execute what I command on his behalf."

Shri Rama, highly agitated, replied to Kaikeyi in the presence of the king: "For shame, O Devi, to speak thus to me. At the command of my father I am willing to do anything, even to casting myself into the fire. At the bidding of the king my parent and author of my welfare, I will gladly drink deadly poison or throw myself into the sea. O Devi, disclose to me his will, I vow to fulfil his command. Be assured, O Mother, Rama does not utter falsehood."

To the ever truthful Rama, Kaikeyi answered in these wounding words: "O Ramachandra, long ago the Maharajah fought against the asuras and fell wounded on the field. I then preserved him and he promised me two boons. For these I ask the installation of Prince Bharata and thy exile to the Dandaka forest. O Great One, if thou desirest that thou and thy father should uphold truth, then hear me. In obedience to thy father, now go into exile for fourteen years. Let the preparations made for thine installation be used for the enthronement of Bharata. Giving up thy claims to the kingdom, do thou with matted hair, wearing a deer skin, live in the Dandaka forest for seven and again seven years. Let the earth be ruled by Prince Bharata. This kingdom filled with an abundance of gems, horses and elephants must be his. On account of this is the king distressed, his countenance pale and he is unable to look on thee. O Rama, obey the king and preserve him by fulfilling his command."

At these cruel words of Kaikeyi, Shri Ramachandra betrayed no sign of distress, but the king realising the future suffering of his son was overwhelmed with grief.

CHAPTER 19

Shri Ramachandra betrays no sign of distress and prepares for exile

THE slayer of his foes, Shri Ramachandra, hearing the words of Kaikeyi, keen as the pangs of death, was in no way moved by them, and answered: " Be it so! To honour the promise made by the king, I will leave for the forest immediately, with matted locks, attired in raiment made of bark, but I desire to know why the illustrious sovereign does not address me? O Devi, fear not, I vow, in thy presence that I shall dwell in the forest, dressed in bark with matted locks; rejoice, therefore! Whatever command the benevolent monarch, ever mindful of my welfare, shall lay upon me, I will gladly execute to please him. There is nothing I would not do for him without hesitation, but one painful thought still lingers in my mind. Why does the king not speak to me himself of Bharata's enthronement? O Mother, by thine order, I am willing to surrender to my brother Bharata, not only the kingdom, but also Sita, together with every object of desire, my wealth and my life. How much more would I do for my father, that he may preserve the vow of truth and serve thy purpose. Render this matter clear to the king. How is it that I behold my father with bowed head, shedding tears? Let messengers on swift horses summon Prince Bharata immediately from his uncle's house, while I, without considering the merit or demerit of my sire's injunctions, enter the Dandaka forest for fourteen years."

Queen Kaikeyi highly pleased by the words uttered by Shri Ramachandra and assured of his exile, urged him to depart, saying: " So be it; messengers on swift footed horses will summon Bharata immediately from his uncle's home. O Rama, being ready to enter the forest, do not delay: depart, therefore, with all speed. Overcome with shame, the king dare not ask thee to depart, but do thou disregard this. O Ramachandra, the king will neither bathe nor partake of food till thou hast entered upon thine exile."

The king, hearing the words of Kaikeyi, cried " Woe",

" Woe ", and, stricken with grief, fell senseless on the golden couch. Raising up the king, Shri Ramachandra, urged on by the words of Kaikeyi as a horse under the lash, prepared to enter the forest in all haste. His heart unmoved by the queen's cruel words, he replied : " O Devi, I did not desire the kingdom to acquire wealth and power, but becoming regent, I wished to preserve dharma. Know me, like the sages, to be a protector of dharma. If I can render any service to my father at the cost of my life, it is as if already accomplished. There is no greater good in this world than service to one's sire by thought, word and deed. On this command, not issued by the king but by thee, I will dwell for fourteen years in the uninhabited forest. O Sati, thou hast been my mother and yet art unacquainted with my nature. If thou had'st known me, no need would have arisen to consult my father on so insignificant a matter. Now I go to take leave of my mother, Queen Kaushalya, and offer consolation to my Sita. Let Bharata rule the kingdom according to dharma and serve our royal father faithfully. This is a son's abiding duty."

Hearing the words of Shri Ramachandra, the king, speechless and overcome with grief, wept aloud, shedding bitter tears. The most illustrious Rama made obeisance to his father lying pitifully there and, then bowing to the feet of Kaikeyi, left the apartment. Having circumambulated the King and Queen Kaikeyi with extreme reverence, Shri Ramachandra came forth from the inner chamber and beheld his friends standing at the door. Shri Lakshmana full of wrath, his eyes suffused with tears, followed Rama.

Shri Rama circumambulated the sacred articles prepared for the installation ceremony in great reverence, and prayed that they should be dedicated to the installation of Prince Bharata. Then turning from them, without a backward glance he slowly withdrew.

The abandoning of the ceremony failed to impair the serenity of Shri Ramachandra, the splendour of his countenance remained unchanged as the moon suffers no diminution of its beauty in the waning period. On renouncing the kingdom and departing for exile, Shri Ramachandra resembled a great yogi and none observed any change of mood in him.

Relinquishing the royal canopy, the beautiful chamara and bidding a respectful and affectionate farewell to his friends and the people's delegates and guests, remembering the sorrow occasioned to them, and restraining his senses, the prince went to the apartments of his mother, to break the distressing tidings to her. Those about him found no change in him, neither in the adornments of his body, donned in preparation for the royal ceremony, nor in the cheerfulness of his countenance. Such was the truthful Ramachandra. As the autumnal moon does not lose its splendour, so the cheerfulness of the mighty-armed Rama did not diminish. Addressing those standing near with sweetness and respect, he approached his mother Kaushalya.

The most valorous Prince Lakshmana, the sharer of his brother's joys and griefs, followed him. Aware of the great distress that would arise in the hearts of his friends, Shri Rama for his mother's sake entered the palace in a serene and cheerful mood.

CHAPTER 20

Queen Kaushalya is afflicted and helpless with sorrow

PERCEIVING that Lion among men, Shri Ramachandra, his palms joined in a gesture of farewell, coming forth from his father's apartments, the ladies of the inner chamber began to lament loudly, saying: "Shall Shri Rama, who fulfilled all our desires without awaiting the injunction of his royal sire and who is our sole refuge, to-day go into exile?

"From his birth he has honoured and respected us as his own mother, Queen Kaushalya. When we have spoken harsh words to him, he was never angry, nor did he ever give any cause for displeasure. That prince who ever reconciled those who were affronted, is to-day going into exile. Our king, acting like an ignorant man, is determined to destroy his subjects and is sending Rama, who is the sole support of all beings, into exile."

Thus, weeping bitterly, all the maids of honour and maid-

servants of the king lamented like cows bereft of their calves. The king hearing their cries of distress, deeply afflicted with grief for his son, overcome with shame, fell down on his couch. Shri Ramachandra, grieving for the woes of his relatives, breathing like a mighty elephant approached his mother's apartments with Lakshmana.

Entering there, he beheld at the first gate the venerable and aged guardian of the door and his attendants, who rose on perceiving the prince, crying " Jai " " Jai " to him. Reaching the second gate, he met with the aged brahmins honoured by the state for their great learning. Saluting them, he entered the third gate where women, the aged and children were keeping guard. The women gave their blessings to the prince and went to inform the Queen Kaushalya of Shri Rama's arrival.

According to scriptural injunctions, the queen had spent the whole night worshipping Shri Vishnu, desirous of her son's good. Clad in a silken sari, she was pouring oblations into the sacred fire, with joy. Shri Rama, entering the chamber of his mother, beheld her offering oblations into the sacred flame; he beheld there the sacrificial articles prepared for the worship of the gods; curds, rice, butter, sweetmeats, rice cooked in milk, garlands of white flowers, sesamum seed, fuel and jars filled with pure water.

Shri Rama saw the fair complexioned queen in a white robe, emaciated through long fasts. After a time, perceiving her son, Shri Ramachandra, she ran towards him as a mare runs to meet its foal. Embracing him, inspired by maternal love, she addressed the great Rama with gentle and affectionate words: " O my Son, mayest thou become aged and righteous like the royal sages. Mayest thou attain the age appropriate to thy dynasty. Mayest thou acquire renown and fulfil thy family duties. O Dear Prince, now approach thy truth-loving father, who awaits thee to-day to appoint thee regent of the kingdom."

Offering her son a seat, she placed before him sweetmeats; Shri Rama, touching them only, with joined palms humbly addressed her; he, ever affectionate and now showing even greater tenderness in protecting his mother's honour, said: " O Goddess, thou art not yet acquainted with the great calamity that threatens us. I must go to the Dandaka forest and have

come to seek thy sanction. It is the season of sorrow for thee, Sita and Lakshmana. Now, entering the forest, my seat will be of kusha grass and there, residing for fourteen years, I shall live on honey, roots and fruits. The king has conferred the regency on Prince Bharata and I, giving up royal fare, must enter the forest to eat the food of ascetics there. By the king's command, Bharata will be installed as regent. For fourteen years, it is ordained that I shall live in the forest, practising asceticism far from the haunts of men. The forest from henceforth will be my home; roots and berries will be my food!"

Hearing these words, the queen fell to the ground like the bough of a fir tree severed from the trunk, by an axe! Resembling a nymph fallen from heaven or a phantom tree struck down, she fell. Shri Ramachandra raised her to her couch, her body soiled with dust, like a steed that has rolled on the earth and gently brushed away the dust with his own hands. The queen, worthy of every happiness, seated by her son, filled with distress, addressed him in the presence of Shri Lakshmana :—

"O Child, O Rama, hadst thou not been born of my womb, I should have suffered the distress of being childless, but I should have been spared this sorrow. O My Son, were I a barren woman, I should not have been thus afflicted, for a barren woman has but one grief, that of being childless. The fortune that befalls a wife, alas! was not to be enjoyed by me for long! Having a son, I looked for happiness, but now, though chief queen, I must bear the piercing words of my rival consorts, no longer showing me deference. What greater calamity can befall a woman? The insults that will be heaped upon me, without thee, will prove unendurable. Alas! This is the season of unfathomable grief and affliction! O My Son, when thou art gone, I shall cease to live. As chief queen, I have already borne great provocation; now, serving Kaikeyi, I shall be deemed lower than her maidservant, indeed some say I am already her slave. Those who attend me, will desert me on beholding Bharata made regent."

Then Queen Kaushalya growing angry, began to utter bitter

words, saying: "How shall I, thus afflicted, look on the face of Kaikeyi? O Rama, seventeen years have passed since thou didst receive the holy thread.[1] Since then, I have lived in expectation of thine installation and the termination of my sorrows, but now I must suffer further. I shall not be able to endure this. O Rama, I shall not be able to suffer the contumely of the other queens in my old age. O Child, not beholding thy countenance resembling the full moon, how shall I bear this miserable life? I have kept innumerable fasts, worshipped the gods and nourished thee till now, yet unfortunate as I am, it has proved to be in vain. Surely my heart is made of stone that it has not broken to-day, it resembles a river in the rainy season that does not overflow under continued rain. Surely death has forgotten me or there is no room in his abode. Had it not been so, he would have carried me hence to-day like a doe carried away by a lion. Assuredly my heart must be as hard as iron that it is not riven under this affliction. O why does not the earth open and engulf me; it seems one cannot die before the time appointed. Those sacred austerities, fasts, meditation and penance undertaken for the prosperity of my child have proved vain, like seeds sown in a barren field. If at this time of sorrow, I might die, threatened with thy separation, I should embrace death as willingly as a cow deprived of its calf. O My Son, of what use is life now to me, robbed of the sight of thy face resembling the full moon? Nay, I will follow thee to the forest like a feeble cow following its calf."

Queen Kaushalya, the mother of Rama, afflicted and helpless, realising her own unfortunate position, and her son to be bound in the service of truth, lamented like a kinnari whose offspring has been made captive.

[1] A brahmin boy is invested with the holy thread at about eight years of age, the ceremony is called Upa-naya.
It is possible that Shri Rama received it earlier.

CHAPTER 21

Shri Rama, in spite of the laments of the queen and Shri Lakshmana, prepares for departure

SHRI LAKSHMANA, overcome with grief, addressed Mother Kaushalya in words suited to the occasion. He said : " O Mother, it cannot be pleasing to thee that Rama, at the command of the king, who is subject to a woman, and oblivious of the prosperity of the kingdom, should go to the forest. Old age has impaired the intellect of the monarch who, impelled by desire, is no longer master of his senses ; what words will he not utter ? I see no fault in Ramachandra for which he should be exiled and deprived of his kingdom. I know no man whether friend or foe who can find fault with Rama even in absence. Like a god, he is guileless, self-controlled and forbearing even to his foes ; what righteous king would abandon such a son without cause ? What son versed in the discharge of a sovereign's duties would give obedience to so puerile a king ? "

Addressing Rama, Lakshmana continued : " O Brother, before the multitude become acquainted with these tidings, assume the reins of the kingdom, I will assist thee in the undertaking. O Raghava, who will dare oppose thee, when like death itself, I stand by thy side, armed with my bow ? If two or three, nay if all the people of Ayodhya resist thee in thine undertaking, I will destroy them. If all the supporters of Bharata oppose thee, not even one shall escape. The meek are ever oppressed. Should our father, inspired by Kaikeyi, become our enemy, then, though worthy of protection, I will undoubtedly slay him ! Even should a spiritual preceptor, prompted by egoity, follow the evil path and do what ought not to be done, he must be restrained.

" On what authority does the king confer the kingdom on the son of Kaikeyi, when the son of the chief queen, rightly heir to the throne, still lives ? O Slayer of thy Foes, who will dare to incur our enmity and give Bharata the kingdom ?

" O Mother, I swear by the truth, by my bow, by the laws of charity, by the merit acquired in worshipping the gods, that

I am Shri Rama's willing servant. O Devi, should Rama enter the blazing fire or the dark forest, know I shall have preceded him. O Goddess, do thou and Shri Ramachandra behold my prowess by which I shall destroy all your sufferings, as the sun destroys darkness. I will also slay the king enslaved by Kaikeyi, who is aged, contemptible, of unsubdued mind and in his second childhood."

Hearing the words of the noble Lakshmana, Queen Kaushalya was overcome with grief and said to Shri Ramachandra: " O Child, thou knowest the content of thy brother's heart, now act as thou considerest meet. It does not befit thee to abandon thy sorrow-stricken mother at the unjust words of her rival. O Righteous One, if thou art established in dharma, then remain here, serve me and acquire virtue. There is no higher duty than service of the mother. I am, with the king, equally an object of thy reverence, and I command thee not to go to the forest. In thy separation, there is no occasion for rejoicing, neither do I desire to live, but with thee I will gladly live, sustaining myself on herbs alone. If thou, leaving me afflicted with grief, go to the forest, then shall I refuse food and yield up my life. Then, O My Son, being responsible for my death thou wilt, like Samudra,[1] unmindful of thy mother, enter hell."

Seeing his mother, the Queen Kaushalya, thus lamenting, the righteous Ramachandra spoke to her dutifully, saying: " O Goddess, I cannot disregard my father's commands, therefore I bow before thee and entreat thy favour and sanction to enter the forest. Know that the Sage Kandu, a great pundit, acquainted with his yogic duty, slew a cow in obedience to his father's commands, knowing it to be a sin, which was thereafter not charged against him.

" In ancient times, likewise, in our own dynasty, the sons of King Sagara, digging the earth, sacrificed their lives at their father's behest. At the command of his father, the son of Jamadagnya, Parasurama, with his axe, cut off the head of his mother Renuka. O Devi, these and other godlike men have obeyed their father resolutely. I, too, without hesitation, shall perform that which benefits my father. O Mother, not I alone obey my father but all those virtuous men, mentioned by me,

[1] Samudra—the Lord of rivers who killed a brahmin.

have been obedient to their father's will. I follow no new law, nor one contrary to the traditions of the royal dynasty, but tread the path of my illustrious ancestors. I am accomplishing nought which has not already been accomplished in this world. He who acts in accordance with his father's commands does not fall from virtue."

Having spoken thus to his mother, Shri Rama addressed Lakshmana, saying: " O Lakshmana, I am acquainted with thine immeasurable love for me, thy valour and thy prowess; none can withstand thee. O Lakshmana, my mother endowed with every good quality is now subject to misery and grief through ignorance of dharma and lack of resignation. O Brother, dharma is the highest good on earth, Truth and dharma are one. My father's command is founded on dharma, hence it is superior to my mother's ruling. O Hero, it is unworthy in one seeking the supreme fruit of dharma, not to fulfil the promise made to his father, mother or a learned brahmin, I cannot, therefore, disregard my father's command. O Hero, inspired by my father, Mother Kaikeyi has urged me to this course, therefore, O Lakshmana, relinquish the idea of bloodshed and embracing the state of virtue, follow me."

Thus lovingly addressing Lakshmana, with bowed head and in great humility Rama turned to Queen Kaushalya and said: " O Goddess, now grant me permission to go into exile. In my absence pray for me. Having honoured my vow, I shall return, like King Yayati who falling to earth from heaven, again ascended thither. O Mother, comfort my unhappy father. Have no anxiety, O Mother, I shall return after fourteen years as desired by my father. Do thou, Sita, Lakshmana and Sumitra obey my royal sire. This is the ancient tradition. O Mother, disregarding the preparations made for mine installation, let thy mind be freed from grief and allow me to go into exile as ordained by dharma."

Hearing the words of Rama, inspired by righteous motives, spoken with courage and equanimity, Queen Kaushalya as one restored to life, gazed steadfastly at Rama and said: " O My Son, if thou art versed in dharma and art mindful of the good done to thee by thy parents, then am I as worthy of thy respect as thy father. O My Son, do not abandon thine unfortunate

mother and enter the forest. O My Child, of what use is my life without thee? The earth, the region of the pittris, heaven and the region of Mahaloka, which are the abodes of highest bliss, for me are all void without thee. An hour with thee is my greatest delight O My Son."

Shri Rama, hearing his mother's lament, was agitated, like a king who is perturbed, when on a dark night his torch-bearers are assailed on the way.

Then the dutiful Rama again addressed his mother rendered almost senseless with grief and Lakshmana distressed and disquieted, and spoke to them for their good, in words that were full of integrity:—

"O Lakshmana, I know of thy prowess and the intensity of thy devotion to me, but now in opposition to my purpose, thou dost increase my mother's misery. O Brother, there are three means to happiness in this world, they are righteousness, prosperity and pleasure. Those who love righteousness should pursue it as a wife acquires merit by being obedient to her husband, and pleasure by endearing herself to him and prosperity by becoming a mother. That undertaking which does not ensure these three, should be given up and that by which they are secured should be carried out. He who pursues prosperity alone, is without friends and has many enemies, and he who is devoted to pleasure, which is not based on righteousness, is an object of contempt. O Brother, the king is firstly our preceptor, secondly our father and thirdly he is an aged man. From the point of view of dharma, I must obey his commands, whether they are inspired by anger or desire. As a righteous man, I must fulfil his behests. Rare is the son so ruthless as to disobey his father. How can I evade the behests of my sire, who is my parent and has full authority over me as a king, and further is the consort of my dear mother Kaushalya? How, therefore, should the queen, abandoning the virtuous king, her lord, follow me like a widowed woman? O Goddess, grant me permission to leave for the forest whilst thou dost recite the Peace Chant, that my vow may be accomplished.

"Like King Yayati of old who returned to heaven, inspired by his love of truth, I, too, shall return. O Mother, I dare not

disobey my father for the sake of a mere kingdom ! Life is brief and I have no desire for the rulership of the world through the sacrifice of virtue."

The mighty Rama thus acquainting his mother with his intention of entering the forest as demanded by Kaikeyi, circumambulated the Queen Kaushalya, fixing his heart on his departure.

CHAPTER 22

He appeals to Shri Lakshmana not to grieve

SHRI RAMACHANDRA then turned to Shri Lakshmana, who unable to endure his distress, full of wrath against Kaikeyi, his eyes distorted, was breathing heavily like a mighty elephant. Addressing him in terms of affection as a beloved brother and friend, patiently calming his fears, Rama said : " O Brother, give up grief and anger and arm thyself with patience, forgetting the preparations made for mine installation, make thyself ready for my departure to the forest. O Lakshmana, prepare with the same zeal as thou didst prepare for my coronation. The mind of my mother, Kaikeyi, is clouded with suspicion on account of my proposed enthronement, therefore, O Lakshmana, act so that her suspicions may be allayed. O Brother, Mother Kaikeyi believes thou wilt use force to place me on the throne. This I cannot endure, nor can I suffer her to experience anxiety. At no time, do I recollect that I have voluntarily given cause for offence to my parents. O Lakshmana, let us relieve the apprehensions of our royal father, ever truthful and valiant but now fearful lest his future life be jeopardized. If I do not abandon the desire for the crown, the distress caused to the heart of the king, at the violation of his vow, will be mine also. O Lakshmana, because of this, I desire to enter the forest without delay, abandoning the project of mine installation. Thinking her purpose accomplished, Queen Kaikeyi will to-day, if I depart for the forest, cause her son Bharata to be summoned

and will make over the kingdom to him with joy. The heart of Kaikeyi will find no rest till I, dressed in a deer skin, with matted locks, enter the forest. I cannot grieve her, who has urged me to go to the forest and contributed to my resolution, therefore, I will depart without delay. O Lakshmana, the acquisition of the kingdom is not part of my destiny. If providence had favoured me, Kaikeyi would not have desired to send me to the forest. O Dear One, thou knowest no distinction was made by me between my three mothers, nor has Kaikeyi looked on me as different from Prince Bharata, but to-day to frustrate my coronation and send me into exile, she has uttered cruel and pitiless words. This is the will of God and nought else. Had it not been so, how should Kaikeyi the daughter of a king, of gentle disposition and noble nature, speak thus like a vulgar woman in the presence of her husband? Whatever is inscrutable to man should be known to be the decree of providence; even Brahma cannot evade the consequences of karma.[1] It is this unalterable and fixed decree that has created the dissension between Kaikeyi and me, not to be understood by man.

"Pleasure, pain, fear, anger, profit and loss, life and death, and similar matters come into being as a result of our karma. Even the sages practising great austerities, prompted by their karma, abandoning asceticism have been swept away by concupiscence and avarice. This sudden happening, never apprehended, this frustration of a well-devised plan is the work of karma. Therefore, I in no wise regret my resolve nor the cancellation of my coronation. Do thou also abandon grief and following me forget the preparations for the coronation. O Lakshmana, with these vessels of water brought hither for mine installation, let my dedication to the ascetic life, be made. Yet what use have I now for these sacred waters? From now on, I shall draw water with mine own hands for every ritual.

"O Lakshmana, do not grieve that the installation ceremony remains unperformed. We know by reason and discernment that there is little difference between ruling a kingdom and living in a forest. O Lakshmana, do not for an instant blame Queen

[1] Karma—The law governing the behaviour of matter in all its gross and subtle forms.

Kaikeyi for obstructing my coronation; prompted by karma, men say what is unlawful."

CHAPTER 23

Shri Lakshmana offers to defeat all those who obstruct Shri Rama's installation

INSTRUCTED by his brother, Lakshmana, his head bowed, was filled with distress on account of Shri Rama's impending departure, yet glad to learn the secret of dharma. Remaining in the cave of anger awhile, breathing like a snake provoked in its hole, his frowning mien resembling an enraged lion, swaying like the trunk of an elephant, with quivering limbs, averting his gaze, he addressed his elder brother, saying: "O Brother, in this evil hour, thou art subject to a great delusion. Ill-timed is this assertion that disobedience to a parent is contrary to dharma. It does not become one virtuous as thou art to speak thus. Thou, a leader among warriors, canst control thy fate, yet like a weak man thou speakest of it as irrevocable. Dost thou respect these wicked beings,[1] O Virtuous One? Dost thou not know how many deceivers appear as righteous men? Take note how the king and Kaikeyi for selfish ends deceive thee and send thee into exile. If this matter of the boons granted to Kaikeyi were true, then why was it not revealed 'ere the preparations for thy installation were made? If it can be said it was done in error, then that error is a calamity. It will cause dissension among the people. How can the younger take precedence over the elder in matters of state? I cannot suffer this, O Great Hero, pardon me. This law thou praiseth, by which thy mind is governed, is incomprehensible to me. Thou who art powerful, why must thou submit to Kaikeyi? Wilt thou obey the unjust command of thy father, contrary to the law of dharma? Dost thou not perceive their duplicity, in frustrating thine installation under the pretext of granting a boon?

[1] The King and Kaikeyi.

I consider the pursuit of such a course to be worthy of condemnation. This is the reason for my distress. Though our parents, the King and Kaikeyi, desire to harm thee and are swayed by passion, who, except thee, would countenance their design? Yet thou attributest this matter to the decree of fate. This action is unpleasing to me. Let the weak and the cowardly trust in so uncertain a fate, heroes and men of patient resolve, do not accept the dictates of karma. He, who by his own endeavours, conquers fate, never suffers. Let it be seen to-day whether fate or exertion prevail.

"That destiny[1] which prevents thine installation, which resembles an elephant refusing to respond to the goad, and having broken its fetters, is wandering about unchecked, that decree will I conquer by my prowess.

"Neither the guardians of the four quarters, nor all the dwellers in the Three Worlds, united as one, can prevent thine installation, how much less then, my father? Those who have planned thine exile, shall themselves pass fourteen years in exile. I will frustrate the hopes of my father and Kaikeyi, who, depriving thee of the kingdom, seek to enthrone Bharata. The power of karma will not bring such adversity to those opposed to us as my valour shall inflict on them! After ruling a thousand years, do thou retire to the forest, leaving thy sons to govern the kingdom, then, like our ancestors, who, becoming aged, withdrew to a hermitage, do thou continue to live in the forest. Formerly, kings in their declining years, giving over their subjects to the governance of their sons and grandsons, used to retire to the forest as ascetics. If, O Rama, thou fearest to rule against the behests of the king, thinking the administration would be insecure, I will protect thy kingdom as the shore protects the earth from the inroads of the sea. If I fail, may I never be called a hero! Now fix thy mind on thine enthronement with these auspicious preparations; singlehanded I can effect the defeat of the kings who obstruct thine installation. These two arms of mine are not for show, nor is my bow a mere decoration. My sword was never meant to dangle at my side, nor are my arrows designed to be kept in the quiver! All these are dedicated to the task of destroying the enemy. I will not

[1] The result of one's karma.

brook the existence of my foes. With my keen bright sword, I will hew their bodies to pieces, even if it be Indra himself. I will cut to pieces elephants, horses and men with my sword, creating large heaps and rendering advance impossible. To-day, my enemies shall fall like clouds rent by lightning. Donning the godha,[1] lifting up my bow, I shall strike the enemy with many shafts and large numbers of them with a single arrow. I shall destroy innumerable soldiers, horses and elephants by piercing their most vulnerable parts with my shafts. To-day I shall demonstrate the power of my weapons and establish thy sovereignty. To-day these two arms accustomed to be adorned with ornaments and sandalpaste and used to distributing charity and to protecting friends, shall prove their prowess by opposing those who obstruct thine installation. O Ramachandra, I am thy servant, tell me who is thy foe and command me to oppose him so that severing them from their fame and friends, the kingdom be placed in thy hands."

Shri Ramachandra, hearing the words of Lakshmana, wiping away his tears, consoled him, saying: "O Dear One, know my chief valour to be obedience to the will of my father; it behoves the virtuous to fulfil their father's command."

CHAPTER 24

The queen realises she has no power to restrain Shri Rama's resolution

SEEING the righteous Ramachandra determined to obey his sire, Queen Kaushalya, her eyes filled with tears and her throat choked with emotion, said:—

"O Rama, thou hast never experienced hardship. Fruit of my womb and the seed of King Dasaratha, thou, following dharma, hast ever spoken sweetly to all, how wilt thou be able

[1] A guard of leather and metal, worn on the left arm to protect it from the bow string.

to endure living in the forest? He whose servants live on sweetmeats and butter, how will that Rama of mine be able to live on roots and fruit? Who will not feel insecurity, knowing King Dasaratha to have banished his illustrious and virtuous son? If he acts thus to such a son, what of myself? If Ramachandra, beloved of all, is compelled to enter the forest, then undoubtedly destiny (past karma) rules our joys and sorrows. O Child, the fire of grief in my heart, fanned by the wind of thine absence, fed on lamentation and affliction; stimulated by tears, emitting the smoke of anxiety, will utterly consume and destroy me, like a forest fire at the end of winter reduces the bushes, creepers and grass to ashes. O Child, as a cow runs after its calf, so shall I follow thee wheresoever thou goest."

Rama, listening to the sorrowful speech of Queen Kaushalya, replied: "O Mother, the king is sorely distressed by the deceit of Kaikeyi, and I also must leave him when I go to the forest. The Maharajah will not survive if thou also come with me. No more cruel act can a woman perform than to leave her husband; it is not to be countenanced. As long as my father lives, it is for thee to serve him. This eternal dharma must be followed by thee."

The virtuous maharani listening to the advice of Shri Ramachandra, he who overcame difficulties with ease, replied submissively to him: "O My Son, thy words are true."

Shri Rama then addressed her who was suffering deep distress, saying: "O Goddess, both thou and I must obey my father. He is first my preceptor, secondly my father, thirdly thy husband and finally the protector, master and lord of us all. Having cheerfully passed fourteen years in the forest, I will return and do thy bidding."

Queen Kaushalya, her eyes brimming with tears, she who did not merit suffering, answered Shri Ramachandra, saying: "O My Son, how shall I endure dwelling with my rivals? If thou art resolved to enter the forest at the command of thy father, then like a wild doe take me with thee."

To his weeping mother, Shri Rama replied: "As long as a woman lives, she should consider her husband as her master and her lord. The king is our master, how should we be

masterless while the king lives? Bharata also is virtuous, humble and devoted to the good of all. He will undoubtedly treat thee with respect and not oppose thee. When I am gone, let not the king suffer on account of my separation, and let him not be overcome by this great grief. The king is now aged, it becomes thee to serve him with every care. Even a virtuous woman, devoted to piety and fasting, if negligent towards her consort, comes to a sinner's state, but she who is devoted to her lord attains heaven. The woman who is ever devoted to her husband and ever ready to seek his welfare, attains heaven, even if she has not worshipped any god. Service of the husband is a duty sanctioned by ancient tradition, by the Veda and by the scriptural law. O Mother, undertake those rituals promoting universal peace and serve the gods with floral offerings. For my sake, give hospitality to pious and learned brahmins and await my return. Performing the discipline of daily purification, give up savoury foods, and existing on simple fare, serve the king. Should the king still be living when I return, truly it shall be well."

The queen, her eyes suffused with tears, distressed on account of the impending separation from her son, replied to Shri Ramachandra: "O Child, thy resolution to enter the forest being fixed, I have no power to restrain thee. O Hero, fate is irrevocable, therefore, enter the forest without anxiety, mayest thou be happy. On thy return, my sufferings will cease. O Auspicious One, when thou returnest on the fulfilment of thy vow, rendering back the debt thou owest to thy father, my joy will be complete. None can comprehend the warp of fate.[1] It is fate that urges thee to oppose me. O Prince, now depart and return safely, promoting my delight with a pure heart. O Child, I pray that thou wilt return soon, and that I shall behold thee in robes of bark with matted locks."

Queen Kaushalya, knowing that Ramachandra was eager to enter the forest, reverently gave him her blessings, uttering auspicious words.

[1] The result of accumulated thought and action through countless lives.

CHAPTER 25

The queen gives her blessing and the brahmins pronounce the benediction

RESTRAINING her grief, sipping a few drops of pure water from her hand, Queen Kaushalya, purifying herself, performed the benedictory rites for the well-being of Rama. She said: " O Prince of the House of Raghu, I may not restrain thee, therefore now depart, and on thy return, tread the path of the virtuous. O Great Raghu, may that dharma which thou hast practised with courage, preserve thee. May the gods thou hast worshipped in the temples and on the highways and the great sages protect thee. May the weapons given thee by the wise Vishwamitra protect thee. O Mighty One, preserved by this service rendered by thee to thy father, mother and the truth, mayest thou live long. May the sacrificial kusha grass, sacred grass rings, altars, temples, sacred places, mountains, trees of every kind, lakes, rivers, birds, snakes and lions ever protect thee! May Brahma, Pusha,[1] Aryama,[2] Indra and Lokapala[3] all be auspicious to thee! May the seasons, the months, the weeks, the years, the day and night favour thee! O My Son, may holy meditation, concentration and dharma, together with the injunctions, ordained in the Veda protect thee! May the Lord Sanat-Kumara,[4] Mahadeva[5] with Uma,[6] Brihaspati, the seven holy Rishis[7] and Shri Narada bless thee! May all the perfect beings adored by me, ever protect thee! May the mountain ranges, the seas as also Varuna their lord, space, the earth, the rivers and the stars with their deities, the planets and the day and night protect thee in the forest! May the six seasons, the twelve months, the whole year and the divisions of the hour promote thy happiness! May the devas, the adhityas[8] and the asuras, wandering in the forest in the guise of hermits, protect thee!

[1] Pusha or Pushan—the Sun.
[2] Aryama—chief of the pittris or ancestors.
[3] Lokapala—guardian of the four quarters.
[4] Sanat-Kumara—mind-born son of Shri Brahma.
[5] Mahadeva—Great God, a title of Lord Shiva.
[6] Uma—Parvati, Shiva's consort.
[7] Seven Holy Rishis—Angira, Atri, Adhitya, Kratu, Poulastya, Vasishtha and Vasu.
[8] Adhityas—sun gods.

"May no rakshasas,[1] pisachas,[2] those who practise cruelty, that which is ill-omened and the eaters of flesh, ever cause thee injury! May no monkeys, scorpions, gadflies, serpents or reptiles approach thee! O My Son, may no elephant, lion, tiger, bear or beast with awful jaws, or buffaloes and those with dangerous horns, be hostile to thee; propitiated by me, may they not cause thee injury in the forest! May thy way be blessed, may thine undertaking be crowned with success! O My Son, mayest thou ever find fruits, roots and the means of subsistence! Mayest thou ever tread the forest unhindered! May all things between heaven and earth protect thee at all times! May Indra, the Moon, the Sun, Kuvera and Yama worshipped by thee, protect thee from thy foes! May Agni, Vayu, Dhuma,[3] and the sacred formulas, taught by the Rishis, protect thee when inadvertently contacting the untouchables! May the Lord of the world, Brahma, Vishnu and the gods not mentioned by me, protect thee in the forest!"

Then the illustrious Kaushalya worshipped the gods with flowers and sandalwood, offering oblations and kindling the sacred fire for the health and peace of Shri Ramachandra with the aid of the pious brahmins, learned in rituals. With butter, white flowers, sacrificial fuel and mustard seed prepared for the oblation by Queen Kaushalya, the learned and pious brahmins performed the Hawan[4] ceremony for the welfare of Rama.

Then the mother of Rama asked the brahmins to pronounce the benediction and present the oblations to the Lokopalas, the priests receiving the remainder. With honey, curds, rice and clarified butter, the brahmins pronounced their blessings and the queen having offered them abundant alms and whatsoever they desired, addressed Rama, saying: "O Rama, may the same blessing bestowed on Indra on the destruction of Bratrasura[5] be thine. May the blessing bestowed on Garuda[6] when conveying away the amrita,[7] be thine, by the power of my

Rakshasas—demons.
Pisachas—ghosts.
Dhuma—god of smoke.
Hawan—an ancient fire ceremony.
Bratrasura or Vratrasura or Vritra—an asura killed by Indra.
Garuda—king of birds, vehicle of Shri Vishnu.
Amrita—the nectar of immortality.

worship of Vinata.[1] May the blessing attendant on Indra, the bearer of the mace, at the time of the raising of the amrita from the ocean at the instance of his mother, Aditi, be thine. O My Son, may the good fortune attendant on the blessed Trivikrama[2] when measuring the world in three strides, be thine also. O Rama, may the seasons, the ocean, the islands, the Vedas and the cardinal points contribute to thy happiness."

Thus, scattering rice over the head of her son, the large-eyed Queen Kaushalya, applying sandal paste to his forehead, bestowed on Rama the healing wood 'Vishalya Karina'. For his protection, the queen silently repeated the mantrams, and though her heart was filled with distress, appeared as one content. Embracing her son, and kissing his head, she said: "O My Son, now go in peace. Mayest thou, having fulfilled the commands of the king, return in health to Ayodhya. O Child, my joy will be complete, when I behold thee at thy coronation. My troubles ended and my ambitions fulfilled, on thy return from exile, beholding thee occupying the throne, I shall know supreme happiness. Having fulfilled the injunctions of thy father, thou wilt return, and I, beholding thee clad in royal apparel with innumerable gems, shall then find peace. O Prince, now depart and accomplish the desire of Princess Sita and me."

The queen reciting the Peace Chant, her eyes suffused with tears, embracing her son again and again, circumambulated him, gazing on his face.

Touching her feet repeatedly, the illustrious Ramachandra, resplendent in the light of the perfection of Self,[3] left for the palace of Princess Sita.

[1] Vinata—Garuda's mother.
[2] Trivikrama—Another name of Vamana, the holy Dwarf, fifth incarnation of Shri Vishnu.
[3] Self—the Divine in man.

CHAPTER 26

Shri Rama acquaints Princess Sita of his resolution

SHRI RAMACHANDRA, ever devoted to virtue, taking leave of his mother, ready to enter the forest, passed through the crowded streets, by his excellent qualities inspiring peace in the hearts of the multitude.

The ascetic Princess Sita, not being acquainted with what had happened, her mind full of joy in the thought of the coming coronation of her consort, worshipping the gods and proficient in every duty, awaited the approach of her lord with a happy heart.

Meantime, Rama dressed in his customary apparel, his head bowed in humility, entered the palace filled with joyful and richly attired persons.

Seeing Ramachandra unadorned, the princess was filled with consternation and fear, and rose trembling from her seat. Rama beholding the princess, dearer than life to him, could not restrain his distress. Sita, seeing the countenance of Rama, sad, pale and moist with anguish, addressed him: "O My Lord, what is this? To-day, the Pushya planet and the moon are in conjunction, and Brihaspati in the ascendant, this is the time fixed for thy coronation by the holy brahmins, why art thou thus distressed? Why do I not behold the canopy, pure as foam, set with a hundred stars over thy head? Why are the chamaras, white as the moon or the swan, not waving to and fro over thee? O Great One, why do I not hear the bards to-day eloquently voicing thy praise, or the pundits reciting the Chant of Peace?

"Why have the learned brahmins not anointed thee with honey, and curds as a mark of thine enthronement? Why art thou not attended by ministers, citizens and courtiers sumptuously attired? Why do four swift steeds with golden trappings, fleet of foot, not precede thee? I do not behold the great elephant resembling a cloud, possessed of every auspicious mark, in thy train? Why dost thou appear downcast when the preparations for thy coronation are completed? O My Lord, why does thy countenance manifest no signs of joy?"

Hearing the sorrowful words of the Princess Sita, Rama

replied: "O Sita, my honoured father has commanded me to go into exile. O Princess, born of an illustrious family, acquainted with the law of dharma and eminent in virtue, hear, while I tell thee what has befallen me. Long ago my father, a lover of truth, granted two boons to my mother Kaikeyi. Beholding the preparations for my coronation, Kaikeyi demanded the fulfilment of her boons and has now gained ascendency over his mind. In accordance with the two boons granted to her, it is mine to pass fourteen years in the Dandaka forest and Prince Bharata to be installed as regent. I am now going into exile and have come to bid thee farewell. Let no words in praise of me be repeated to Prince Bharata, lest he withhold his protection from thee. It is for thee to submit to his will for the sake of thy support. The king has conferred the regency on Prince Bharata forever. It behoves thee to act in such a way that he be not displeased with thee. O Wise One, now I go to the forest in obedience to my father's behest, remain here with a quiet heart. O Sinless One, when dressed as a hermit I leave for the forest, then do thou also cease to adorn thyself. Rising early, do thou worship the gods according to the prescribed rituals, then, approaching my father and mother, offer obeisance to them. My mother, Queen Kaushalya, having grown old, is afflicted on account of my departure, it becomes thee to serve her with respect. My other mothers should be honoured and served by thee like Queen Kaushalya, their hearts are also full of love towards me. Like my own mother Kaushalya, they have also cherished me, therefore I deem them worthy of the same honour. My brothers Bharata and Shatrughna should be regarded by thee as thy brothers or thy sons. It behoves thee never to provoke Prince Bharata, from now ruler of the kingdom and chief of the family. Served with sincerity, a king is pleased, but if provoked, he becomes full of wrath. A monarch renounces his own offspring if they oppose him and receives even strangers, as friends, who have promoted his welfare. O Kalyani, obeying King Bharata, remain here, seeking his good. O Dear One, I shall enter the great forest, it behoves thee to remain here; I charge thee to act in such a manner that no one will be displeased."

CHAPTER 27

She entreats Rama to allow her to accompany him

THE sweet-speaking Sita, worthy of Rama's love, thus being instructed to remain in Ayodhya, though filled with affection, indignantly replied: " O Offspring of a great king, O Rama, how canst thou speak in such wise? O Prince, thy words evoke laughter. O Chief of Men, father, mother, son and daughter-in-law live according to their merit and dependent on it, but a wife enjoys the fortune of her husband since she is a part of himself. I am therefore entitled to share thy father's command and also go into exile.

" The happiness of a woman depends on her husband, neither father, mother, son, relative or companion avail her at death; in this world and in the other world, the husband alone is her all-in-all. If thou to-day depart for the forest, I will precede thee on foot, clearing the thorns and kusha grass from thy path. O Hero, relinquishing anger and pride, take me with thee without hesitation. There is no fault in me that merits my remaining here, without thee. The joy experienced by lords of men whether dwelling in a palace or transported in an aerial chariot through the heavens or possessing the eightfold psychic powers, is far inferior to the joy of the wife in the service of her lord. My royal father has instructed me fully in the duties of a wife and, therefore, I have no need of further instruction in the matter. Assuredly I shall accompany thee to the forest, uninhabited by men, filled with savage beasts, such as bears and bulls. O My Hero, I will dwell in the forest as happily as in the palace of my father, having no anxiety in the three worlds save the service of my spouse. O Hero, I will wander with thee in the forest according to the ancient spiritual ordinance, free from desire for pleasure, traversing the honey-scented woodland. O Lord of my Life, since thou canst protect and support innumerable people, canst thou not more easily protect me? Without doubt to-day I shall enter the forest with thee, O Fortunate Prince, none can break my resolve. I shall live happily on fruits and roots with thee in the forest,

causing thee no anxiety. Under the protection of one as wise as thee, O Lord, I desire to enjoy the beauty of lakes, mountains and rivers without hindrance. O Rama, I long with thee to see the beautiful lakes where swans and kavandava birds[1] play and charming lotuses bloom. There will I bathe with thee, O My Lotus-eyed Lord, sporting there with thee. Thus would I pass a thousand years with thee, the happiness enjoyed in thy company renders even the delights of heaven distasteful to me. O Prince, without thee, heaven itself would not please me. I long to enter the forest with thee where deer, monkeys and elephants roam. O Prince, serving thy holy feet, I will pass the time there as happily as in my royal father's house. Recognizing no other, in thee my mind finds its highest delight; separated from thee, I shall surely die. O Master, be gracious enough to take me with thee, assuredly I shall not burden thee."

Shri Ramachandra hearing the humble and piteous words of Shri Sita, unwilling to let the princess accompany him, sought to dissuade her by describing the hardships of a forest life.

CHAPTER 28

Shri Rama seeks to dissuade her

THE virtuous Ramachandra, devoted to truth reflecting on the hardships to be borne in the forest, in spite of Sita's entreaty was unwilling to grant her request.

Once more, he addressed the weeping Sita, insisting she should not accompany him, saying: " O Sita, thou art nobly born and devoted to the practice of virtue; remain here continuing to act righteously. O Frail Princess, act according to my will. Life in the forest is fraught with misery, O Sita, relinquish the thought of sharing my exile, many are the dangers there. The forest is named 'Antara', meaning it is unfit for human habitation. For thine own well-being, I advise thee to remain here; in the forest there is no comfort. The rivers

[1] Kavandava bird—a species of duck.

issuing from the mountains are difficult to cross, the lions roaring in the mountain caves strike terror in the heart and render the forest perilous ; therefore, remain here. O Sita, many wild beasts wandering at will in the forest may assail thee, therefore life there is full of danger. The deep marshes and the rivers infested with crocodiles are difficult to cross, even an elephant may find them impassable. Many savage elephants wander here and there; assuredly the forest is replete with perils. Waterless are the paths covered with thorns and poisonous creepers, there the hoarse cry of wild fowl re-echoes ; the forest is a source of suffering. Wearied by journeying the traveller finds no silken pillows nor a soft couch, but at night must sleep on the bare earth, his bed the fallen leaves ; verily the forest is a source of suffering ! O Sita, in the forest, there is nought to eat save the fruit that has fallen from the trees ; with this the traveller must be satisfied day and night, therefore the forest is a source of suffering ! O Daughter of Mithila, fasting to the utmost extent, with matted locks, wearing robes of bark, one must constantly worship the devas and pittris and offer respectful hospitality to the unexpected guest. Thrice daily must ablutions be performed by those who live according to the prescribed ordinance, therefore, the forest is a source of suffering. O Youthful Princess, it is necessary to make offerings of flowers on the altars, plucked by one's own hand, as ordained by the sages. A dweller in the forest must be satisfied with whatever food he can obtain, therefore the forest is a source of suffering. Great storms visit the forest, covering it with darkness by day; constant hunger and many other perils prevail there, therefore is it a source of suffering. O Beautiful One, great snakes and pythons dwell in the forest, serpents as tortuous as the currents of the river live in the waters and obstruct the traveller's path, therefore the forest is a source of suffering. O Delicate Princess, scorpions, poisonous reptiles, hornets and mosquitoes afflict one constantly in the forest ; therefore the forest is a source of suffering. O Charming Princess, the forest is filled with briars, harsh grass and gnarled trees obstructing the way, it is therefore a source of suffering. Life in the forest is full of conditions adverse to the body and manifold dangers, it is therefore a source of suffering. O Sita,

a dweller in the forest must relinquish anger and avarice and practise severe penances, nor must fear visit him in the midst of alarms.

"Do not, therefore, consider entering the forest which is not meant to be thy lot. Reflecting carefully, I see nought but suffering in the forest for thee."

Thus Rama disclosed his mind to Sita and sought to dissuade her from entering the forest, but the princess, sorely distressed, unable to consent to his counsel, then made answer.

CHAPTER 29

Sita continues her entreaties but the prince is unwilling to consent to her departure

SHRI SITA hearing Rama's words, was greatly distressed and with tears coursing down her cheeks, answered in a low voice :—

"O Rama, the sufferings of a life in the forest described by thee, will, through my love for thee be transmuted to joys. Deer, bear, lions, elephants, sarabhas,[1] birds, bulls and other woodland beasts, on beholding thy matchless countenance, will flee away stricken with terror. All fear thee, O Lord! Instructed by my elders to remain in thy company, it behoves me to go with thee ; separated from thee, I cannot live. When near to thee, O Rama, even Indra the King of the Devas dare not do me injury. O Rama, thou hast taught me that a woman must not be parted from her lord. O Most Wise Lord, long ago, in my father's house, I was told by one conversant with the movements of the planets that I should have to dwell in the forest. O Mighty One, since I was told by that brahmin skilled in occult sciences, of my life in the forest with thee, I have looked forward to the time with joy. O, what felicity to live with thee in the forest! O Dear One, thou must grant me permission to go to the forest with thee. I must go with thee, it cannot be otherwise, thus shall I prove my

[1] Sarabha—a legendary animal with eight legs.

fidelity, enjoined by my elders. The time for the fulfilment of the brahmin's prophecy is at hand. O Hero, I know all the miseries of life in the forest, but it is those of unsubdued mind who suffer them. While still living in my father's house, a pious and saintly woman predicted in the presence of my mother, that I should live in the forest. O My Lord, formerly I have begged thee to let me sport with thee in the woods. The time is now come, grant my prayer and let me go with thee! O Prince, may the undertaking be propitious. Glad am I to accompany thee to the forest, to serve thee there will be my great delight. O Lord, relinquishing envy, accompanying thee in the forest, all my sins will be washed away through my devotion to thee. I have no other god but thee, if death overtakes me I shall not experience happiness in the other world without thee. I have heard from the brahmins that a woman given by her father according to the sacred ordinance to a man, becomes his wife in this world and also in the other world. O Prince of Beautiful Locks, in perfect devotion to thee, filled with humility, regarding pain and pleasure as equal, sharing thy austerities, permit me to accompany thee. If thou art still unwilling to take me, a woman distressed, to the forest, then I will seek death by poison or drowning."

In this wise, Sita entreated Rama to let her accompany him, but still the great prince was unwilling to consent. Seeing Rama disinclined to grant her request, Sita was filled with grief, and her hot tears fell, moistening the earth. Shri Rama, seeing the princess flushed with anxiety and indignation still sought to divert her from her purpose.

CHAPTER 30

Seeing her fixed resolve Shri Rama grants her request

Shri Rama again stressed the dangers of the forest and sought to persuade Sita not to accompany him; but Sita, with fixed resolve, trembling with fear yet urged by love and pride, spoke as in jest: "O Rama, if my father the Lord of Mithila, had

known thee as a man in form only, but a woman at heart, he would never have united me to thee. Alas! that men in ignorance speak of Rama as resembling the sun in splendour, when in reality he is not so. O Rama, what makes thee sad? Whence thy fear that thou, abandoning me who am devoted to thee, shouldst go to the forest? O Hero, know me to be to thee what Savitri[1] was to Satyavanta, the son of the valiant King Dyumatsena.[2] O Sinless Prince, I have never looked on any, even in thought, but thee, nor do I resemble those women dishonouring their family's name who look on other men; therefore, let me go with thee.

"O Rama, why dost thou desire to surrender me to Bharata, I, who, long resident with thee, thy youthful spouse, am solely devoted to thee? Whether living as an ascetic or hermit or residing in heaven, I will follow thee. Journeying in the forest will not weary me; by following thee, I shall experience the same delight as walking in the gardens or sporting with thee in the woods. O Rama, in thy company the thorny briars such as kusha, sarpat and shara will seem to me as soft as deer skin. The dust raised by the storm, covering my body, will be as sandalpaste to me. I shall share with thee the couch of grass with the same delight as a bed of silken down. What ever leaves, roots or fruits thou dost bring for me will be as sweet and satisfying as ambrosia. Enjoying with thee, the fruits and flowers of every season, I shall not call to mind my mother, father and home. No anxiety will be caused to thee by my presence in the forest, neither shall my sustenance be a burden to thee. I tell thee the forest will be heaven in thy company, and without thee even the palace will be hell to me. Be pleased, therefore, to let me go to the forest with thee. I fear nought in the forest, but if thou still refuseth to take me with thee, then will I end my life by poison; never will I dwell among strangers. O My Lord, without thee nothing is left to me but death; abandoned by thee, it were better to die. I cannot endure the grief of thy separation even for an hour, how then shall I suffer it for fourteen years?"

[1] Savitri—daughter of King Aswapati, who rescued her husband Satyavanta from the God of Death and restored him to life. The full story is found in the Mahabharata Vana Purana.

[2] Dyumatsena—Prince of S'alva.

Thus Sita, lamenting and embracing Shri Rama, wept aloud. From her eyes, like a she elephant wounded by poisoned arrows, long-restrained tears issued, as fire is kindled by the friction of wood. Crystal drops fell from her eyes as water slips from the petals of the lotus flowers. The face of the princess resembling the full moon, withered by the fire of intense grief, looked like a lotus withdrawn from water.

Shri Ramachandra, taking Sita, afflicted and fainting, in his arms, spoke to her in the following wise: " O Devi, I do not desire even to enter heaven if it causes thee pain! Nought do I fear! Like Brahma, I am wholly fearless! Though able to protect thee in every way, yet not fully knowing thy mind, I declined to let thee share my exile. Seeing thou art destined to share my exile, I do not desire to abandon thee, as a man of virtuous conduct determines not to sacrifice his good name. O Beautiful One, following the example of the good of yore, I shall act in the same manner; do thou follow me as Suvarchala[1] follows the sun. O Daughter of King Janaka, I am not entering the forest by my own desire, but to obey the injunctions of my father. O Devi, it is the duty of a son to obey his parents, I could not endure life if I failed to observe my father's command. Fate is invisible, who can control it, but the parents and the spiritual preceptor are visible deities and their orders must be obeyed. What in the world is so sacred as the worship of that which grants dharma, prosperity and pleasure? By this worship, homage is paid to the three worlds. O Sita, observance of truth, charity and sacrifice accompanied by suitable offerings (dakshina) is of less avail in obtaining the spiritual realm than the service of parents and the Guru. Those who serve their parents and the spiritual preceptor obtain heaven, wealth, learning and progeny and nothing is impossible for them. Those who are devoted to their parents and their Guru obtain entrance to heaven and the regions of the devas, the gandharvas and Brahma. This is eternal righteousness—to obey the command of thy parents, fixed in the practice of truth. O Sita, not knowing thy mind, I advised thee not to accompany me, but now seeing thy fixed resolve I desire to take thee with me. O Princess, whose eyes sparkle like wine, thou art destined

[1] Suvarchala—consort of the Sun.

to be my companion, do thou assist me in the performance of my duty. It is well that thou didst desire to be with me in accordance with the custom of our forbears. O Sita, prepare to go into exile without delay; without thee, even heaven does *not please me. Bestow thy jewels on the brahmins in charity* and offer food to the poor; hasten, make no delay. Give to the brahmins, jewels, ornaments, rich apparel, whatever thou possessest or is employed for my entertainment, all that is mine and thine, couches, coverlets, and vehicles give in charity to the brahmins and what remains distribute among the servants."

Shri Sita, happy at the acquiescence of Prince Rama and knowing her departure to be fixed, began to distribute all her possessions. Free from anxiety, Sita bestowed on the pious brahmins her wealth and all her jewels.

CHAPTER 31

Shri Lakshmana is resolved to accompany them

SHRI LAKSHMANA being present, hearing the converse of Rama and Sita, was afflicted and unable to restrain his grief, and weeping bitterly, spoke as follows: "If thou art resolved to enter the forest in which dwell many wild beasts and elephants, I will accompany thee with my bow and arrows. I will wander with thee in the beautiful forest to the delightful sounds of birds and deer abounding there. O Ramachandra, without thee I do not care to dwell even in the region of the gods nor do I desire immortality or dominion over other abodes."

Seeing Prince Lakshmana determined to accompany him to the forest, Shri Ramachandra sought to dissuade him, but Shri Lakshmana answered: "O Brother, having already granted me permission to accompany thee, why dost thou now prohibit me? O Sinless One, I would fain know what prevents thee from taking me with thee; my mind is clouded with fears."

Shri Ramachandra perceiving Lakshmana humbly standing before him ready to accompany him, said: "O Lakshmana, thou art most dear to me, virtuous, brave and constantly engaged

in righteous deeds, thou art as dear to me as my life. Thou art my younger brother, my servant and my friend. If I grant thy request, who will protect the renowned Kaushalya and Sumitra in thine absence? O Brother, the king who granted *their desires, as a cloud responds to the need of the earth,* is still under the bondage of pleasure desire. When Kaikeyi, the daughter of King Ashvapatti, becomes the queen mother, she will not treat her rival consorts well. She will not heed the needs and comforts of Queen Kaushalya and Sumitra, nor will Bharata, governed by his mother, respect them. Therefore, O Lakshmana, remaining here, winning the king's favour, render Queen Kaushalya happy. O Brother, heed my instruction. O Knower of Dharma, acting thus, thou wilt demonstrate thy great devotion to me and also serve thy mother and thereby earn great merit. O Lakshmana, reflecting on these words, follow my injunction. Bereft of us, our mothers cannot be happy."

Rama having uttered these words, the eloquent Lakshmana replied in gentle accents: "O Hero, Bharata will assuredly have due regard for the Queens Kaushalya and Sumitra. If Bharata, having obtained this mighty kingdom, through evil counsel and pride should not protect the queens, I will assuredly slay that wicked wretch. O Noble One, Mother Kaushalya can well command thousands like me. That illustrious queen can easily protect my mother and herself and countless others. Make me thy humble attendant, there is no wrong in this. Thus shall my highest desire be accomplished and thou shalt also find satisfaction. Armed with my bow and arrows, a spade and basket, gathering wild fruit and flowers, I shall precede thee, pointing out the way. Each day, I shall provide thee with ascetic's food, leaves and other suitable offerings. Do thou, with the daughter of the King of Videha, enjoy thyself on the mountain slopes. Sleeping or waking, I shall do all for thee."

Shri Ramachandra listened to the loving words of Shri Lakshmana with delight and answered: "O Lakshmana, seek the permission of thy mother Sumitra, and other relatives to go with me. O Lakshmana, fetch, without delay, the dread bows given by Varuna himself to Rajarishi Janaka at the time of the great sacrifice, also the impenetrable armour and the celestial

quivers, the two swords bright as the sun, decorated with gold, which King Janaka presented to me at the time of my nuptials and which were deposited with care in the house of Shri Vasishtha."

Knowing his exile to be certain, Shri Lakshmana bade farewell to his relatives and, bringing the weapons decorated with fresh flowers from the home of Shri Vasishtha, presented them to Rama.

Then Shri Ramachandra spoke joyfully to Lakshmana and said: "O Handsome Prince, thou art welcome at this hour, O Brother, I desire to offer all my substance in charity to the brahmins and ascetics, do thou assist me. To those brahmins dwelling in the city devoted to their Guru, to them and to my servants distribute all my wealth. Summon the excellent Suyajna, the son of Shri Vasishtha, and bid him come here without delay. Having duly honoured him and other pious brahmins, I shall set out for the forest."

CHAPTER 32

Shri Rama bestows his wealth upon the brahmins, his friends and servants

COMMANDED by Shri Rama, Lakshmana went to the house of the Rishi Suyajna. Beholding the rishi seated in his sacrificial pavilion, he made obeisance to him and said: "Renouncing the kingdom, Shri Ramachandra is entering the forest, come in all haste to see him embark on this arduous undertaking."

Having performed his evening devotion, the Rishi Suyajna, in company with Prince Lakshmana, entered the beautiful and enchanting palace of Shri Rama. Perceiving this knower of the Veda to have come, Shri Rama and Sita rose and with joined palms welcomed the rishi with reverence. Offering him salutations, Shri Rama bestowed on him alms, beautiful ornaments, jewelled earrings, necklaces of precious gems strung on

golden thread, amulets and other jewels, and at Sita's instance, said: "O Peaceful Rishi, be gracious enough to accept this necklace and gold which Shri Sita offers to thy spouse, also the bracelets and rings of beaten gold and jewelled bangles; about to enter the forest, Shri Sita offers them to thy wife. Accept also this soft pure couch with a coverlet embroidered with precious stones, pearls and tassels. This elephant also, named Shatranjaya, which my uncle gave me, I present to thee, O Great Rishi, together with a thousand golden coins."

Suyajna, requested by Shri Rama, accepted all the gifts, and gave his blessings to Rama, Lakshmana and Sita. Then Rama, ever of sweet speech, addressed Lakshmana as Brahma addresses Indra, saying: "O Lakshmana, call hither the two excellent sons of the Rishi Agastya and Shri Vishwamitra, and honour them with gifts of gems. Give to each in abundance as a field of corn is visited by rain, a thousand cows, gold, silver, jewels and ornaments. To that brahmin, versed in the Taittirya[1] who daily, with devotion, gives his blessing to Queen Kaushalya and Sumitra, who is learned in the Vedanta and experienced in all matters, give vehicles, silken robes and women attendants, so that he may be wholly satisfied. To my confidential adviser, Chitaratha, who has served me over a long period, give precious jewels, cloths and abundant wealth, and to the brahmacharis, my fellow students who study the Veda and are of excellent conduct, following no profession, living detached, enjoying good food, yet dependent on alms, give to each of these a thousand cows. O Lakshmana, bestow on them eighty camels apiece loaded with jewels, a thousand bullocks loaded with rice and two hundred bulls for tilling the ground. O Lakshmana, give them cows so that they may enjoy butter, milk and curds, and to each of the brahmacharis attending on Queen Kaushalya give a thousand cows and a thousand golden coins and give them abundant alms so that my mother may be pleased with us."

Obeying the commands of Prince Rama, Shri Lakshmana offered hospitality to the brahmins. Like Kuvera, he gave to every brahmin abundant wealth as instructed by his brother. Then Shri Rama, seeing his servants standing near him weeping,

[1] Taittirya Sanhita—A collection of teachings from the Black Yajurveda, instructions on the performance of sacrifice.

bestowed on them sufficient wealth for their entire lives and said: "Until I return from the forest, keep watch on the palace belonging to Shri Lakshmana and myself."

Then all wept overcome at the thought of his departure, and Rama turning to his treasurer said: "Bring hither my wealth," and they heaped quantities of gold and silver before him, wonderful to behold. Then Rama with the aid of Lakshmana distributed it among the aged, the sick and the needy.

Now, there was a certain brahmin of the family of Garga, whose name was Trijata, whose complexion was pale on account of much privation. He, toiling honestly, went to the forest daily with spade, axe and plough, maintaining his family on the fruits and flowers of the forest. His wife, worn down with much poverty, gathering her young children together, addressed her husband, saying: "Abandoning thy plough and spade, follow my instructions. Go with all speed and approach the virtuous Shri Ramachandra, undoubtedly thou shalt obtain something there."

The brahmin, covering himself with a few wretched rags, set out for Shri Rama's palace, his countenance, in lustre,[1] resembling that of the Rishi Bhrigu or Angiras.

Entering the fifth gate unchallenged, he came to where the multitude were assembled and approaching Shri Ramachandra, said: "O Illustrious Prince, I am destitute of wealth and having many children, subsist on what I find in the forest, look upon me with compassion."

Shri Rama answered jestingly: "I have still many thousand cows not yet bestowed on any. Casting thy staff from this spot, I will bestow on thee as many cows as can stand in the space between thee and where the staff has fallen."

Trijata, hearing these words, binding his rags firmly about his waist, twirling his staff, threw it away with all his might. The staff fell on the further bank of the river Sarayu where thousands of royal cows and bulls were grazing. Shri Rama ordered all these to be driven to the brahmin's hermitage and thus addressed him: "Be not displeased, O Brahmin, that I jested with thee; I desired to test thy great powers. Now, the

[1] It is here implied that the exalted state of the brahmin expressed itself in the form of spiritual radiance.

cattle will be driven to thine abode, ask further whatsoever thou desirest. O Brahmin, I will bestow anything thou asketh on thee; all my wealth is to be given to the brahmins. Nothing so pleases me as the bestowal of my wealth on brahmins such as thou, bringing me renown."

Then the brahmin Trijata highly gratified, taking the cows, departed with his wife, full of power, renown and devotion, blessing Shri Ramachandra.

Thereafter, Rama bestowed the remainder of his wealth, acquired through virtue, upon his friends, honouring them with marks of respect. There was not a brahmin, servant, pauper or beggar that he did not honour with charity at that time.

CHAPTER 33

He goes, with Sita and Lakshmana, to King Dasaratha's palace

SHRI RAMA, having with Sita, distributed riches in abundance to the brahmins in charity, went with Lakshmana and Sita to see King Dasaratha, followed by their servants bearing weapons adorned with flowers and sandalwood.

The people of the capital mounting to the top of high buildings and the roofs of seven-storied houses to view them, were dispirited. Some said: "Behold now Shri Rama, formerly attended by four divisions of the army, is to-day only followed by Sita and Lakshmana." Others answered, "Shri Rama, having tasted the delights of sovereignty and experienced in all the joys of life, he who confers wealth on the needy, prompted by duty, desires to render fruitful the promise of his sire. To-day, Sita never beheld before even by the birds, is exposed to the view of the common people on the highway."

One said: "Surely, the king is possessed of an evil spirit or he would never send so dear a son into exile." And another, "None ever banished even a traitor, how much less Shri Rama who has won the affection of the whole world by his excellent conduct? He is not only virtuous but is innocent,

compassionate, learned, truthful, self-controlled and of subdued mind. His subjects are as distressed at the thought of his absence as the water-fowl during the summer drought. The sufferings of Rama, Lord of the world, afflict all, as does a tree uprooted from the earth. The glorious Ramachandra, knower of dharma, resembles the root of a tree of which the flowers, fruit, leaves and branches are the people. Let us, abandoning our gardens, fields and homes, sharing his woes, follow Shri Rama. Our houses deserted, their treasure removed, their courtyards neglected, without grain or stores, their beauty gone, will be buried in dust. The devas will no longer visit them, but mice scurrying hither and thither will fill them with countless holes. Without water, covered with soot, uncleansed, no daily rites will be performed there. Fallen in ruins, strewn with broken vessels, as if cursed by the king or by divine decree, all these, utterly forsaken by us, let Kaikeyi enjoy.

" We pray that this city abandoned by Shri Rama may be converted into a wilderness and the forest where Rama dwells become a flourishing city. May the snakes forsake their holes, the deer and birds abandon their abode in the mountains and valleys, and the lion and elephant leave the forest, in fear of us and come and dwell in the capital of Ayodhya. May the city abandoned by us, bereft of hay and grain having become the resort of serpents, deer and birds, be ruled by Kaikeyi and her son and may we, dwelling in the forest with Rama, enjoy fully every happiness."

Shri Rama passing by, hearing their converse, was not in any way disturbed, but proceeding slowly, like a young elephant, with majestic stride approached the palace of his father which resembled the Meru mountain. Shri Rama entering the royal palace guarded by seasoned troops, beheld Sumantra standing there disconsolate. Shri Rama, with a smiling countenance, passing the people who were afflicted and filled with grief, approached his father's apartment, desirous of serving him.

Before entering the royal chamber, he requested Sumantra, dejected on account of Rama's departure, to inform the king of his arrival. Desirous of fulfilling the command of the virtuous monarch, Shri Rama, determined to enter the forest, requested Sumantra to make known his presence to the king.

CHAPTER 34

The king gives his blessing while the whole palace is filled with lamentation

THE dark-complexioned, lotus-eyed Ramachandra, that peerless prince, instructed his minister to announce his arrival to the king. On this, Sumantra entering the royal apartment, beheld the king sorely distressed, lamenting bitterly, like the sun under eclipse or a fire buried in ashes or a lake without water.

The learned Sumantra with joined palms, addressed the sorely grieving monarch by praising him in a fitting manner and offering obeisance, he said: "Jai to thee, O King." Then, falteringly, in low and gentle accents he added: "O King, thy son Rama, that Lion among men, is at thy door, having distributed his whole wealth to the pious brahmins and servants; now having taken leave of his friends, he wishes to approach thee. Clothed with every excellent quality as the sun with its rays, he is about to depart for the forest, be pleased to receive him, O Sire."

The virtuous monarch, the knower of dharma, profound as the sea, pure as the sky, spoke: "O Sumantra, summon the ladies of the court, I wish to see Rama in their presence."

Entering the private apartments of the queens, Sumantra said: "His majesty demands your presence, go to him without delay." Thus addressed by Sumantra, in obedience to the wishes of their consort, they prepared to approach the king. Three hundred and fifty women, their eyes reddened with weeping on account of Rama's departure, surrounding Queen Kaushalya, slowly advanced towards the king. They being present, the king commanded Sumantra to bring his son before him.

Sumantra bringing Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Sita with him, speedily entered the apartment of the king. The monarch beholding Shri Rama approaching, rose from his seat, and ran towards him in haste, with his consorts, but ere he reached him fell senseless to the earth.

Then Shri Rama and Lakshmana advancing, lifted up the king who had been rendered unconscious by grief and suffering. The palace resounded with the lamentations of a thousand women crying, " Rama, Rama ", "Alas ! Alas ! " the tinkling of their ornaments, drowned in the tumult of their cries.

Shri Rama and Lakshmana supporting the king in their arms, conveyed him to the couch, and after a long time, he revived. Then Shri Ramachandra addressed the monarch who was sinking in the ocean of grief, and said: " O Great King, Master of All, I am about to enter the Dandaka forest, be gracious enough to look on me with favour. Grant also that Lakshmana and Sita accompany me, since they, setting aside my counsel that they should remain here, have with fixed purpose, resolved to follow me. O Sire, giving up grief, command us, as Prajapati commands his subjects."

His eyes filled with compassion, fixing his gaze on his beloved son, the king, knowing him to be about to enter the forest with a serene heart, said : " O Ramachandra, I have been deceived by Queen Kaikeyi by reason of a promise, do thou, setting me aside, seize the kingdom of Ayodhya by force."

Hearing the king's words, Rama, eminent in virtue, spoke eloquently and humbly: " My Lord, may God grant thee yet a thousand years to live and rule the earth! Desirous of following truth, I shall assuredly enter the forest, dwelling there fourteen years. I shall then return to serve thee and offer thee homage."

Held fast in the toils of truth, the king, urged on by Kaikeyi, wept and full of distress, answered : " O Child, to attain felicity in the other world and renown on earth and for the sake of thy return, enter the forest with a peaceful heart. May no fear from any source visit thee on the way. O Ramachandra, firm in truth and in the performance of duty, none can divert thee from the path of righteousness. O My Son, do not yet depart, stay one more night with thy mother and me. Satisfied after the night, early in the morning, do thou set out for the forest. My Child, for my sake, thou hast undertaken that which none can accomplish. For my good and my future happiness, thou hast chosen to enter the forest. O Child, in truth, I cannot suffer thy departure but am helpless. Deceived by Kaikeyi,

whose designs resemble a fire covered with ashes, I am caught in this snare, but why must thou also suffer? O Child, what wonder that thou, my eldest son, should desire thy father to uphold the truth."

Hearing the words of his afflicted parent, Shri Rama, deeply distressed, answered: "O Father, if to-day I should remain happily in the royal palace, what of to-morrow? Therefore, with thy permission, I would fain leave at once. Let thy kingdom, filled with wealth and grain, inhabited by thy subjects, surrounded by tributary states, be given to Prince Bharata! O Giver of Boons, my resolution to enter the forest is fixed. Thus hast thou ordained! I shall reside in the forest for fourteen years with the ascetics. Do thou, without delay, give the kingdom to Bharata! I desire nought, nor is happiness as dear to me as obedience to thy commands. O My Father, do not grieve, nor be distressed; the mighty ocean, Lord of the Rivers, does not overstep its bounds. O Sire, I desire neither kingdom nor pleasure, nor even Janaki,[1] nor delight, nor heaven, nor life itself, but only wish to see thee the votary of truth. O My Father, thou art as a god to me, I vow by the truth and the merits acquired by me that my words are free from the taint of hypocrisy. O My Father and Lord, I cannot remain here a moment longer; restrain thy grief, nothing can move me from my resolve. When Kaikeyi commanded me to enter the forest, I answered "I will go", therefore, true to my word, I shall depart. Do not be distressed, O My Lord, I shall live in the forest where peaceful deer abound and birds sing their beautiful lays. O Father, a father is said to be the god of gods; knowing thee to be a supreme deity, I am obedient to thy behests. O August King, I shall easily pass fourteen years in the forest and then return to thee. Now it becomes thee to pacify those afflicted and sorrowful. O Lion among men, fulfil thy duty and do not fall a victim to grief. I renounce the capital the kingdom and the earth; let them be given to Bharata. Without hesitation I shall follow thy command and enter the forest. Let this kingdom adorned by high mountains and deep forests, filled with cities and villages, be ruled by Prince Bharata according to dharma. Let thy word be fulfilled.

[1] Janaki—a name of Sita.

O King, my heart is not given to delights nor to any object of pleasure, all I desire is to carry out thy commands, approved by virtuous men. O King, give up all sorrow for my sake; I neither desire happiness nor wealth, nor the earth, nor Janaki, nay not even life. I desire the world to know thee as the votary of truth. O My Lord, be happy. I, entering the forest filled with many kinds of trees, viewing the mountains and rivers, shall dwell joyfully, living on fruits and roots."

The king filled with anguish, embraced his son and fell senseless to the earth. The queens all began to lament, save Kaikeyi alone. Then the aged Sumantra also fell unconscious and the whole palace was filled with lamentation.

CHAPTER 35

Sumantra arraigns Queen Kaikeyi

COMING to his senses, the minister Sumantra, overcome with anger, breathing heavily, grinding his teeth, wringing his hands, beating his head, his eyes growing red, his colour altered, showed every sign of distress. Perceiving the Queen Kaikeyi to have forfeited the king's regard, Sumantra pierced her heart with words as keen as arrows, causing her to tremble. Penetrating to the most vulnerable parts of her being, Sumantra exposed the hidden defects of the queen by his barbed words. He said: " O Lady, thou hast abandoned thy husband the nourisher and supporter of the movable and immovable. There is nought undesirable in the world that thou hast not accomplished. I consider thee the murderess of thy husband and the destroyer of thy family. By thy vile deeds, thou hast smitten King Dasaratha, who is unconquerable, who resembles Indra and who is immovable as a mountain. O Kaikeyi, do not insult the aged king who has conferred these boons upon thee. Obedience to her husband should, in a woman, far exceed the love of a thousand sons. It is the ancient tradition of this dynasty, that the eldest son succeed his father, but thou seekest

to revoke it and make thy son ruler while the aged king still lives. Let thy son Bharata rule the kingdom, we will follow Rama wheresoever he goes. No one of good report will remain to help thy son in the administration, since thou seekest to repudiate the immemorial usage. I wonder the earth does not open and swallow thee for thy misdeeds. Why do the holy sages not condemn thee utterly? What fool cuts at the root of a sweet mango tree with his axe in order to plant a nimba[1] tree in its place, which does not bear sweet fruit even if watered with milk. It is a common saying that honey does not flow from the nimba tree. I perceive thee to be as wicked as thy mother. The sins committed by thy mother are known to me, I have heard of them on trustworthy report. Thy father, by virtue of a boon granted to him by a Yogi, understood the language of all creatures; of every bird, he understood the voice. Once, returning to the capital, he heard the converse between two ants and laughed, whereupon thy mother grew wrath and threatened to take her life, saying: 'I must know the cause of thy laughter.' The king replied, saying: 'O Lady, if I tell thee the cause of my laughter, it will undoubtedly lead to my death.' Then thy mother spoke to her husband, Kaikeya saying: 'I care not if thou livest or diest, tell me the cause of thy laughter. If thou wert dead, thou couldst not insult me with thy laughter'."

The king approaching the Yogi, told him the whole story, and the Yogi said: "O King, let thy wife return to the house of her father or die, do not thou reveal the secret to her." Then King Kaikeya with a contented mind abandoned thy mother, and lived free like Kuvera. O Sinful Queen, thou also followeth the evil path, deceiving the king and urging him to evil ways. It is a true saying 'The son follows the father and the daughter the mother'. Do not follow thy mother, but obey thy husband, the king, our protector, by regarding his word. Cease to be ruled by evil and do not lead thy husband into the way of unrighteousness. The king will not rescind the promise made to thee. O Lady, entreat the king to bestow the crown on Rama who is the eldest son, who is generous, virtuous, a fulfiller of his duty, and a protector of all living beings. If Shri Rama goes

[1] Nimba Tree or Nima Tree, a tree with exceedingly bitter leaves.

to the forest, the whole world will speak ill of thee. Let thy mind be at peace and let Rama be crowned. If any other than Rama rule the kingdom, it will not profit thee. If Rama becomes regent, then the king following the ancient tradition will doubtless retire to the forest."

Thus did Sumantra with harsh words arraign the queen in the assembly, but Kaikeyi was in no wise moved, neither did she show any sign of repentance, nor did her countenance change.

CHAPTER 36

She disregards the words of the chief minister and the king

THEN King Dasaratha, deeply distressed on account of his vow, addressed the weeping Sumantra, saying: "O Sumantra, prepare four divisions of the army laden with wealth to accompany Shri Rama. Let beautiful and eloquent women and merchants follow in his train, together with rich traders who can set up stores stocked with those things necessary for the army of Shri Rama. Let those personal attendants pleasing to Rama, having received abundant wealth, accompany him. Let chosen citizens accompany Rama with instruments of war and vehicles, and those who know the forest paths, go also. Shri Rama hunting the deer and elephants, drinking fresh honey and enjoying the beauty of the rivers will call those left behind to remembrance. Let all my wealth and grain be sent with Rama to the uninhabited forest. Observing sacrifices with the sages in sacred places, bestowing alms upon them, Shri Rama will dwell there happily. Prince Bharata will govern the people here and Rama set out abundantly provided."

Kaikeyi was seized with fear on hearing the words of the king, her mouth dried up and she was unable to speak. Trembling with agitation, she then said: "O Chief of men, Bharata will not accept the kingdom stripped of its wealth and people, resembling unfermented wine."

The eyes of the king reddened with anger at the cruel and

shameless words of Kaikeyi, and he replied: "O Wicked Wretch, why dost thou seek to crush me with this load of sorrow? When thou didst demand Rama's exile, thou didst not add he should go empty handed?"

At the king's words, the fury of Kaikeyi was redoubled, and she said: "Of thy dynasty, King Sagara sent his son Asumanjas into exile. Let Rama depart in the same manner."

At these words, King Dasaratha cried, "Woe, alas!" and all the people felt ashamed, but Kaikeyi remained unmoved. Then the chief minister, Siddhartha by name, a virtuous man, much favoured by King Dasaratha, addressed Kaikeyi, saying: "O Lady, Asumanjas, seizing the children playing in the street, threw them into the river Sarayu, for this he was considered an exceedingly wicked man. The people of the city, disgusted with his cruel deeds, entreated King Sagara to banish him, saying: 'Wilt thou preserve us or Prince Asumanjas in the city?' King Sagara enquired of them the cause of their fear and they said in reply: 'Prince Ansumanjas has become insane, catching our children while at play and throwing them into the river; he rejoices in this act.' King Sagara, therefore, abandoned his malevolent son and placing him on a carriage with his wife, clothing and other necessities, proclaimed: 'Asumanjas is banished for life.' Asumanjas, armed with an axe and basket, wandered about in the forest and reaped the fruit of his evil deeds. The righteous Maharajah Sagara banished his son on account of his evil conduct but, O Queen, what wrong has Rama done that he should be exiled by thee? I see no fault in Rama. It were as easy to find a taint in the moon! O Lady, if thou hast found any fault with Rama, then declare it openly and he will be banished from the kingdom. O Kaikeyi, it is an unrighteous act to abandon one following the path of virtue, without substantial reason; such an act would destroy the splendour of Indra himself. O Lady of Beautiful Countenance, do not destroy the prosperity of Shri Ramachandra and become a source of ignominy to the people." Hearing the words of the minister Siddhartha, King Dasaratha, overcome with grief, spoke to Kaikeyi, in broken accents and said: "O Sinful One, dost thou disregard the words of my

minister? Art thou blind to thine own welfare and mine? Art thou determined to follow the evil path? Giving up my wealth and substance and the comforts of the palace, I will follow Rama. Do thou rule at ease with Bharata for ever."

CHAPTER 37

Despite the instruction of Vasishtha, Shri Sita still desires to enter the forest

HEARING the words of the chief minister Siddhartha and those of the king, the gentle prince humbly made the following reply: "O King, having renounced all pleasures to live on the products of the forest, what need have I for wealth, an army or other requisites? Who will concern himself with the ropes binding the howdah to the elephant when he has parted with the elephant? O Great One, such am I, what occasion have I for an army in the forest? Let it be given to Prince Bharata. Bring me garments of bark. I go to pass fourteen years in the forest, and need but a spade to dig for roots and fruit and a creel and basket. I wish to start without further delay."

Hearing his words, Kaikeyi rose up and brought the robes of bark, and in the midst of the assembly without shame, addressed Prince Rama saying: "Put them on."

Shri Ramachandra receiving the raiment from Kaikeyi, discarding his rich apparel, put on the dress of bark. Shri Lakshmana also putting off his beautiful robes, put on the dress of an ascetic in the presence of his father. Shri Sita dressed in a lovely silken sari, seeing the robes of bark proffered her, was startled, like a doe at the sight of the fowler's snare.

The Princess Janaki, endowed with excellent qualities, received the bark dress, in shame and distress. Versed in the duties of a faithful spouse, she, addressing her god-like husband, her eyes suffused with tears, said: "How do the ascetics put on the robes of bark?"

Shri Sita, ignorant of the custom, remained confused.

Unskilled in the art of wearing robes of bark, putting one end of the vestment round her neck and holding the other in her hands, she stood perplexed. Then Ramachandra, chief of the good, approaching the princess, fastened the robe of bark over her silken sari. All the ladies of the court, perceiving Rama assisting Sita in putting on the dress of bark, began to weep and timidly addressed the illustrious Rama : " O Beloved Prince, thy father has not granted Shri Sita permission to enter the forest. Do thou enter the forest in accordance with the king's behest, but let not Janaki go with thee. Let our life be fruitful beholding her face. Let Lakshmana go with thee for thy protection, but the beautiful Sita is not fitted to dwell in the forest like an ascetic. O Rama, prompted by dharma, go without delay as thou desirest but, we entreat thee, leave Princess Sita with us."

Shri Rama, knowing that Sita was not willing to stay there in his absence, disregarding the request, helped Sita to don the bark raiment. Shri Vasishtha, the king's preceptor, seeing Sita attired in the habit of an ascetic, was displeased, and said to Kaikeyi : " O Destroyer of thy Dynasty, O Evil-minded Kaikeyi, thou hast deceived the king and now exceed the boons granted to thee, thou art dead to all good sense. It is not for Princess Sita to enter the forest, let her rule in the place of Rama till he return. The wife is, as it were, half of her spouse, therefore, what is his due is hers also. Shri Sita being the half of Shri Rama is in his absence entitled to the throne. Should Shri Sita accompany Rama, then I and all the people of Ayodhya will follow him. Where Rama goes with Sita, there will follow the guards, the people of the kingdom and the citizens of the capital. Yea, even Prince Bharata and Prince Shatraghuna, assuming the robes of ascetics will accompany their elder brother. Then this kingdom abandoned by men, peopled by trees alone, will be governed by thee, O Thou, bent on the destruction of thy subjects. Know well, that is no kingdom where Shri Rama is not king, but the forest in which Rama dwells becomes the kingdom. The king unwillingly consenting, may bestow the kingdom on Bharata, but Bharata will never accept the crown, nor will he honour thee as his mother, if he be the true son of King Dasaratha. Even if thou

shouldst die, yet will Prince Bharata, acquainted with the ancient law, refuse to rule the kingdom as long as his elder brother, Shri Ramachandra lives. Thou, desiring the advancement of thy son, Bharata, seeking to make him king, art in reality bringing him to grief, since all will follow Shri Ramachandra. O Kaikeyi, thou shalt see beasts, snakes, deer, birds and even trees, bend before Rama, swayed by his love, not to speak of men. O Lady, remove the dress of bark and let Sita be attired in royal robes, the ascetic's garb ill befits her."

The Guru Vasishtha forbade Sita to don the robe of bark and said to the queen: "O Daughter of the King Kaikeya, thou hast demanded the exile of Rama alone, let Sita be clad in royal robes when accompanying Rama. The boon exacted by thee did not imply the exile of Shri Sita, therefore, let the princess, beautifully arrayed and adorned, enter the forest in a royal chariot."

Despite the instruction of the resplendent sage, chief among the brahmins and the king's preceptor, Shri Sita, not relinquishing the ascetic's dress, desired to enter the forest, attired like her lord.

CHAPTER 38

Shri Rama requests the king to protect his mother during his absence

SEEING Sita, like a widow though possessing a husband, putting on the habit of bark, all the people present condemned King Dasaratha. The king hearing their murmuring lost all interest in life, virtue and fame, formerly cherished by him. Sighing deeply, he said to his consort Kaikeyi :—

"O Kaikeyi, it is unfitting for Sita to enter the forest wearing the habit of an ascetic. Our holy Guru Vasishtha has spoken truly. Sita is not fitted for life in the forest, that frail princess is worthy of perpetual happiness. Has the daughter of the great Emperor Janaka caused injury to any, that amidst the people

she stands mute, dressed in a robe of bark, like an ascetic? I gave no promise that the daughter of King Janaka should put on the dress of a devotee. Let this princess enter the forest attired in an auspicious manner, with all her ornaments. My death is not far distant and my mind is in confusion; by promising these boons to thee, I have been brought to nought. This act is consuming me as is the bamboo by its flowering.[1] If it be said that Shri Rama has done thee injury, O Sinful One, what harm did Janaki ever do to thee? Of what dost thou accuse the daughter of King Janaka, whose eyes resemble the gazelle's and who is meek and gentle.

"O Wicked One, by sending Rama without reason to the forest, thou shalt assuredly enter hell; what else will not befall thee on account of thy evil deeds?

"When Shri Rama approached me on the eve of his installation, then didst thou forbid him to inaugurate the ceremony and charged him to enter the forest with matted locks in an ascetic's garb. By my silence, I gave consent, but now, desirous of plunging thyself into hell thou requirest Sita to enter the forest robed in the habit of a recluse."

King Dasaratha, lamenting, saw no end to his distress. At length, helpless and overcome with grief, on account of his son, he fell to the ground.

Shri Rama, his head bowed, ready to enter the forest, observing his father's distress, said: "O King, my mother Kaushalya, devoted to her lord, aged and of a generous disposition, who never speaks ill of any, bereft of me will be drowned in a sea of sorrow. She who has hitherto known no suffering is now worthy of thy special regard. O Father, thou to whom honour is due, regard my mother with affectionate attention, that she may not suffer in the separation from her son and the bearing of many woes, but live dependent on thee. O Emperor, equal to Indra in power, protect my mother in my absence that she may not languish and die."

[1] When a bamboo flowers, the whole clump is said to perish.

CHAPTER 39

As they prepare for departure the palace resounds with grief

HEARING the words of Rama and beholding him in the guise of an ascetic, the king lost consciousness and his consorts turned away in distress. Overcome with grief, the wretched monarch could neither look on Rama nor utter a word to him and for a space remained insensible. Then, regaining consciousness, the long-armed king, remembering Rama, began to lament: " Now, without doubt, I know that in some previous birth, I separated many calves from their mothers and deprived many beings of their lives, on account of which all this has befallen me. The vital airs do not leave the body before the appointed time; though tormented by Kaikeyi, yet death does not claim me. Alas! I behold Shri Ramachandra, resplendent as fire, divested of his royal robes and attired in ascetic's garb. This evil caused by Kaikeyi, through guile and the desire for personal advantage is the source of universal distress."

The king's eyes were suffused with tears and crying: " Rama, Rama," his throat choked, and he could utter no more. After some time, still shedding tears, he addressed Sumantra, saying: " Yoke the best steeds to the chariot and convey Shri Rama out of the city. Now it is made clear that a man's virtue leads him into affliction, since so wise and valiant a son is being banished by his parents."

As instructed by the king, Sumantra yoked the most excellent of steeds to a richly decorated chariot and bringing the golden car with the best steeds yoked thereto, before the prince, said humbly: " The chariot is at hand."

The king then summoned his upright and trustworthy treasurer and spoke to him in words suitable to the place and time: " Bring hither for Janaki, costly apparel and ornaments to serve the princess for fourteen years." As instructed by the king, the master of the treasury brought the various articles and delivered them to Princess Sita. The highly born Sita, attiring herself in a sumptuous robe and ornaments, made ready to depart for the forest. Thus attired, Shri Janaki illumined the palace as the rays of the rising sun illumine the sky.

Queen Kaushalya embraced the princess of virtuous conduct to her bosom and blessing her said: " The world is filled with undutiful wives, who cease to regard their lord when he has fallen into distress. Such is the nature of those who having enjoyed great pleasures, on finding their consort involved in trouble, condemn and sometimes even abandon him. Many are the women, untruthful, heartless, unchaste, devious[1] and vain, full of evil passions, the destroyers of long-honoured ties. Neither a worthy family nor duty, nor the instruction of the Guru, nor gifts, sway them, nor do they honour the marriage ties, their minds being fickle. But those women devoted to their husbands, of virtuous conduct, honouring the tradition of their family, truthful, following the instructions of their preceptor, regard their lord as the chief of men. Therefore, do not condemn my son, now ready to enter the forest, who should be regarded by thee rather as a deity, whether in poverty or prosperity."

Shri Sita, understanding the import of these words, inspired by dharma, humbly replied: O Noble Lady, I will fulfil thy commands. It is known to me that a woman should serve her lord, and my parents have instructed me in the matter. Do not deem me a false woman. I am as unable to forsake the path of virtue as the sun's light the moon. As a lute is useless without strings, as a chariot cannot move without wheels, so is a wife bereft of her husband, even if she have a hundred sons.

" Father, mother or son can give but a small measure of happiness, but a husband is the source of limitless joy. What woman is so unworthy that she will not obey her husband? I am acquainted with all the duties of a wife, being instructed by those eminent in virtue. A husband is as a god to his consort, never shall I not honour him."

The simple-hearted queen, shedding tears of distress on account of the separation from her son, hearing Princess Sita's words, was comforted.

Then Rama said: " O Mother, when I am in the forest, do not look on my father with a reproachful countenance, the term of my exile will soon be ended. The fourteen years will

[1] Whose minds are not easily known.

pass like a dream. Surrounded by my friends, thou shalt behold me serving my sire."

Speaking thus to his mother Kaushalya, Shri Rama reflected how to address the three hundred and fifty other consorts of the king. To these who were bitterly lamenting, he spoke with humility. " While living amongst you, if I have ever, in ignorance, offended you, be gracious enough to pardon me." These pious and humble words of Rama, inspired by dharma, touched the hearts of the queens, causing them to shed tears and their lamentations resembled the sound of krouncha birds.

The palace of the king, formerly resounding to the beating of drums resembling the crash of thunder, was to-day filled with the wailing of the sorrow-stricken queens.

CHAPTER 40

All Ayodhya is distressed to see Shri Rama's chariot depart

SHRI RAMA overcome with grief, touched the feet of his sovereign and bowing down, with Lakshmana and Sita, circumambulated the king. Having taken leave of his sire, Rama with Sita paid reverence to the sorrow-stricken Queen Kaushalya.

Then Shri Lakshmana bowed before the Queen Kaushalya and embraced the feet of his mother Sumitra. His mother weeping, desiring her son's good, blessed Lakshmana and said: " O My Son, Shri Rama was born of Queen Kaushalya for the protection of the world, and I have borne thee so that, devoted to Shri Rama, thou shouldst accompany him to the forest. O My Son, do not neglect the service of Shri Rama. O Sinless One, whether in fortune or in adversity, regard him as thy life! It is the duty of the good to be subject to their elders. The tradition of thy dynasty is the giving of charity, the performance of sacrifice, death on the field of battle and implicit regard for thine elders."

Speaking thus, Sumitra seeing Rama ready to depart for the forest, again and again exhorted Lakshmana in this wise: " O

My Son, enter the forest with Rama. O Child, have no anxiety, do not grieve either for thy father, mother, home or country, esteem Rama to be Dasaratha, Janaki as myself and the forest equal to Ayodhya."

Sumantra now addressed Rama with humility as Matali[1] addresses Indra: " O Illustrious Prince, be pleased to mount the chariot, I will take thee wheresoever thou desirest. Let the period of thine exile enjoined by Kaikeyi begin to-day."

Then the beautiful daughter of King Janaka, adorned with the jewels, bestowed on her by the king, cheerfully mounted the waiting vehicle, which shone like the sun. Shri Rama and Lakshmana also swiftly ascended the chariot enriched with gold and weapons.

Having regard to the period of exile, King Dasaratha had bestowed on his daughter-in-law, robes and jewels and ordered arms and mantra-charged weapons, armour and shields to be placed on the chariot. Seeing that all were mounted, Sumantra set the chariot in motion guiding the horses swift as the wind. Rama having started for the Dandaka forest, the whole city, young and old, men and women, soldiers, elephants and horses, distracted and full of indignation and distress, became as beings demented. The loosing of elephants, and the loud neighing of horses filled Ayodhya with tumult and ferment. Young and old, distraught, ran after the chariot of Rama as men overpowered by the sun plunge into water. Some running beside the royal car, some behind looking up towards Rama, others weeping and lamenting, cried to Sumantra: " O Charioteer, drive slowly, draw in thy steeds, so that we may see the face of Rama so soon to be hidden from us. Surely the heart of his mother must be made of steel that it did not break on seeing the godlike prince departing for the forest. Great indeed is Shri Sita, who follows her husband like a shadow, as the light of the sun that never forsakes the Meru mountain. O Lakshmana, perfect art thou, constantly serving thine amiable and godlike brother. This is perfection, this is prosperity, thus to attend thy brother is the way to heaven."

Thus lamenting, following the chariot of Rama, the people could not restrain their tears. The afflicted and wretched

[1] Matali—Indra's charioteer.

monarch, King Dasaratha, overcome with grief, coming forth from the palace barefooted, surrounded by his queens, cried out: " I must again behold my beloved son." Then he heard the lament of the women wailing like she elephants when their mates are bound in chains, and like the full moon in eclipse, King Dasaratha was bereft of his splendour.

Shri Rama, free from anxiety, urged the charioteer on, saying: " Faster! faster!" and as he spoke, enjoining Sumantra to drive more speedily, the people cried, " Stay, stay", so that the charioteer knew not how to obey both commands. The dust raised by the wheels of Rama's chariot was laid by the tears of the people. As Shri Rama left the city, the people weeping and bewildered were distraught, the tears of the women falling like drops of water on lotus leaves, when fishes leap. The people following Rama's chariot and perceiving the anguish of the king, wept in sympathy. A great tumult now arose from the ladies of the palace and the king's attendants all weeping and crying, " O Rama! O Kaushalya!" and hearing the wailing and lamentation of the people Shri Rama looked back and beheld the king and his mother Kaushalya, barefooted, following his chariot, and was filled with sorrow. Shri Rama, bound by the cord of duty, turned his eyes from his parents, as a foal not permitted to follow its dam. Perceiving his royal parents, unacquainted with suffering, worthy of excellent chariots, running barefooted towards him, he said to Sumantra: " Drive on speedily!" unable to bear the sight of his parents' distress, as an elephant is unable to bear the goad. His mother Kaushalya trembling and tottering, ran towards him, like a cow hearing the cries of her calf that has been bound, crying, " O Rama! O Sita! O Lakshmana!" The king calling, " Stay! Stay!" to the charioteer, with Rama crying, " Go forward speedily", caused the heart of Sumantra to be riven, like one standing between two rival armies.

On this, Rama addressed him, saying: " On thy return to the palace, when charged by the king with disobeying his commands, do thou say: 'Amidst the noise of the rolling wheels, I was unable to hear.' Further delay will prove calamitous." Shri Sumantra regarding the words of the prince, signalling the people following to return, urged the horses on.

The chariot outstripping the king, caused him to halt with his household and mentally circumambulating Rama, he returned to the palace. The courtiers now said to the king: "None follows a friend far, whom he wishes to see return." King Dasaratha hearing this injunction, bathed in perspiration, utterly wretched, stood gazing at the receding chariot.

CHAPTER 41

The whole world grieves for Prince Rama

THAT Lion among men, Prince Ramachandra, having in humility departed, a great cry of distress arose among the ladies of the inner apartment. They cried: "Where is Ramachandra, the only asylum and refuge of the orphaned, the weak and the suffering? Where is Prince Rama, who when provoked, showed no anger, who caused no agitation to any heart, who appeased those who were wrathful, and considered others' distress as his own? Where is that Rama now, who treated us with the same regard as he showed his illustrious mother, Queen Kaushalya? Where is he wandering now, that Rama, Protector of the World, who has gone to the forest, persecuted by Kaikeyi, and exiled by his father? O, how insensible the king has grown, that he has sent the virtuous and truthful Rama, the object of universal love, into exile." In this way, all the ladies of the court wept aloud like cows who have been bereft of their calves. The king overwhelmed with grief on account of separation from his son, suffered increasingly on hearing the loud and piteous cries of the ladies of the palace. On the prince's departure, no brahmachari performed the fire ceremony, no householder prepared food but passed the day in deep distress. The elephants cast off their trappings and the cows refused to nourish their calves, mothers showed no delight at the sight of their first-born. Trishanku, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn and Venus and other inauspicious planets gathered round the moon, pulsating there; the stars lost their brilliance and the planets their splendour.

Vishaka,[1] growing dim, was scarcely distinguishable in the sky. The clouds, driven by a strong wind, overtaking each other, resembled waves rising in the sea. When Shri Rama departed, an earthquake caused the city to tremble, the ten cardinal points were covered in darkness, neither were the planets nor the stars visible. All the inhabitants of the city were overwhelmed with misery, none partook of food that day or found pleasure in any pastime. All the people of Ayodhya, sighing heavily, were filled with sorrow and grieved for the king. Those walking in the streets wept and nowhere was there any sign of joy. No cool breezes blew, nor did the moon shine, the rays of the sun were weak and the whole world mourned for Rama. Sons gave no thought to their parents, husbands were indifferent to their wives and brothers showed no affection to each other; all were sunk in grief. The friends of Rama, unconscious of themselves and filled with distress, were bereft of sleep. Without Rama, Ayodhya resembled the earth with all its mountains, suffering from drought. Every household was consumed with grief and the cries of elephants, horses and warriors filled the city.

CHAPTER 42

Without Rama the king's heart finds no rest

So long as the dust raised by the wheels of Rama's chariot could be seen, so long did the king not withdraw his gaze from the way. So long as King Dasaratha could see his beloved and most virtuous son, Shri Ramachandra, so long did he stand gazing after him, and when the dust was no more visible, the wretched monarch, stricken with grief fell to the earth. Then Queen Kaushalya taking hold of his right hand and Queen Kaikeyi his left, ministered to him. The virtuous and upright king beholding Queen Kaikeyi near him, said: "O Wicked Queen, touch me not, I do not desire to see thy countenance. Thou art neither my consort, nor do I desire

[1] Vishaka—a lunar astrism, appearing in October.

relationship with thee; thy servants are no longer my servants, nor am I their master. Thou, who hast abandoned obedience to thy lord, I now repudiate. Thy hand, accepted by me when circumambulating the sacred fire, I relinquish, and renounce the worldly and spiritual pledges given thee in the ceremony. If Bharata, receiving this kingdom, is satisfied, then let him not perform my obsequies."

Queen Kaushalya, torn with grief, raised the king, soiled with dust, and conveyed him to his chariot. The king sorely afflicted, remembering his son in ascetic's garb, resembled one who has murdered a brahmin or touches a blazing fire with his naked hand. Turning again and again towards the path that the chariot had taken, the king's countenance resembled the sun in eclipse. Conceiving his son Rama to have passed beyond the city boundary, and thinking of him, he again gave way to grief, crying: "I see the marks of the hoofs of the horses that were yoked to the chariot of my son, but him I do not see. Alas! My Son, who perfumed with sandalpaste, slept on soft pillows, fanned by beautiful women, to-day sleeps beneath a tree with wood or stone for his pillow. In the morning, he will awake on the hard ground, his mind oppressed, his body smeared with dust, sighing deeply like a bull rising from beside a spring. The dwellers in the forest will behold Rama rising like an orphan and wandering as one forlorn. That daughter of King Janaka worthy of every happiness, her feet pierced with thorns, hearing the roar of animals like tigers, will be struck with terror; O Kaikeyi, thy ambition is fulfilled, now rule the kingdom as a widow for I cannot support life without the chief of men."

Thus lamenting, the king returned to the capital, like a man having cremated one supremely dear to him. He beheld courts and houses deserted, the markets forsaken and the temples closed, while on the royal highway only the feeble and afflicted were to be seen. Seeing the city desolate and remembering Shri Rama, weeping bitterly, the king entered the palace as the sun enters a cloud. As the presence of an eagle deprives a lake of its serpents, rendering it still, so did the capital appear when Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Sita had gone into exile.

Then the king in distress, his throat choked with grief, spoke in faint and trembling accents: "Take me speedily to the palace

of Queen Kaushalya, the mother of Rama, nowhere else can I obtain peace."

The attendants carried the king to the apartments of Queen Kaushalya and placed him on a couch, but the king's heart could find no rest; the palace without Rama, Lakshmana and Sita appeared to him like the sky bereft of the moon. Finding no delight there, the king lifting up his hands, cried: "O My Son, O Rama, art thou leaving me? How blessed are they who seeing Rama return, will embrace him."

Finding the night dark, resembling the hour of death, the king at midnight thus addressed Kaushalya: "O Kaushalya, I do not see thee, my sight has followed Rama, nor has it yet returned, therefore, reach forth thy hand and touch me, O Queen."

Seeing her royal consort merged in the remembrance of Rama, the queen, sighing, seated herself by the king and began to lament in sympathy with him.

CHAPTER 43

The lament of Queen Kaushalya

QUEEN KAUSHALYA, deeply afflicted by the separation from her son, seeing the king lying on the couch merged in grief, said: "O King, that evil Kaikeyi having discharged her poison on Shri Rama, will wander about at will, like a snake that has cast its slough. That sinful woman, having accomplished her design and sent Rama to the forest will ever inspire me with terror, like a venomous serpent in the home. If her demand had been that Rama should dwell in the city on alms or had she condemned him to be her slave, it were better than exile. She has cast out Rama, as the oblation offered to the asuras is cast away by those who tend the sacrificial fire. The long armed Rama, the wielder of the great bow, walking like the king of elephants, must by now have reached the forest with Sita and Lakshmana. O King, consider how thy son Rama, who has never before experienced suffering, is banished by thee, urged by Kaikeyi! O What fate

will befall them now? Without wealth, exiled in his youth when a king's happiness should have been his portion, how will he be able to live on roots and berries in the forest? Will the time ever come when I shall see Rama, Lakshmana and Sita return, putting an end to my sorrow? When will that glad day dawn, when the illustrious capital filled with rejoicing crowds, decorated with flags, banners and garlands, welcomes Rama? O will that auspicious hour ever strike, when the citizens hearing of his return will be filled with gladness, like the sea at the time of the full moon? When will Shri Rama with Sita, enter the city, like the bull who, at dusk, preceding the herd of cows, returns to the town. When will the people of the capital, waiting to scatter rice over him, gather in thousands on the highways to welcome Rama, the subduer of his foes? O, when shall I see my sons, resplendent as two mountain peaks, return to Ayodhya, adorned with earrings, bearing the sword and scimitar. When will the two princes, circumambulating the city with Janaki, receive gifts of flowers and fruit from the hands of virgins and brahmins? When will the virtuous and sagacious Rama run towards me, leaping like a child? Surely my love pours forth for him, as the breasts of mothers when suckling their infants. O Great King, because of this, Kaikeyi has increased my love for my child; bereft of him, I am like a cow whose calf has been forcibly carried away by a lion. My only son Rama is versed in all the classics and endowed with every excellent quality; without such a son, I cannot live. O Great King, I cannot sustain life in the absence of my brave and beloved son; the fire of grief caused by the separation from my son is consuming me, as the rays of the sun in summer consume the surface of the earth."

CHAPTER 44

She finds peace in the consolation of Queen Sumitra

THE righteous Queen Sumitra hearing the lament of Queen Kaushalya addressed her in reasonable words: "O Queen, why dost thou weep in abject fashion, for thy son, the chief of men, endowed with every virtue? O Noble Lady, Shri Rama has renounced the throne and entered the forest to render his father illustrious, as the votary of truth. Shri Rama, honouring his father, has conducted himself as the best of men and secured the future glory of his sire. There is no cause for grief, since Rama is treading the path of dharma, neither is there cause to grieve for Lakshmana, ever compassionate to all, sinless, serving Rama and in every way worthy of the highest good. The tender-limbed Janaki, too, is following thy virtuous son. O Queen, the exile of Rama is no cause for sorrow since he is the protector of all beings and the follower of virtue. O Queen, the banner of his good name waves over the three worlds. Consider the purity of Rama; even the sun dares not cause him suffering by its rays. In his presence, the hot winds of the forest in summer will grow cool and like the spring breeze bring him refreshment! When asleep in the forest at night, the moon, like a father, will succour him with its cool beams. That Ramachandra, to whom the Brahmarishi Vishwamitra gave celestial weapons on the death of his son Shambara, that valorous son, that lion among men, depending on the strength of his arms will dwell in the forest as fearlessly as in his own palace. That hero whose arrows destroy his foes, is certain to be succoured by the earth. That Rama, endowed with great prowess, power and courage, will soon return on the termination of his exile, to claim the kingdom. O Lady, Shri Rama, who illumines the sun which gives light to the whole world, who gives splendour to the fire, who is the supreme ruler of rulers, who is the fame of fame and the essence of forgiveness, who is the chief of beings; wherever he dwells, in the forest or the city, all is one to him. Shri Rama, this great hero, will speedily regain his kingdom, together with Sita, the earth and every prosperity.

Shri Rama for whom, when departing for the forest, the people of Ayodhya filled with grief, shed tears, will soon regain the kingdom. Nought is difficult to obtain in the world by him, who, though invincible, entered the forest, dressed like an ascetic, followed by Sita, who is Lakshmi[1] in another form.

"What should be difficult for him, who, armed with bow and sword, is preceded on his way by Lakshmana? O Lady, abandon grief and infatuation, assuredly thou wilt behold Shri Rama returning from his exile. O Thou who art irreproachable, O Kalyani, O Auspicious One, thou wilt behold thy son like the rising moon, placing his head at thy feet. Thou wilt shed tears of joy, seeing thy son installed on the throne and in possession of the king's treasury. O Lady, neither grieve nor let thy mind be troubled, I see nought that is inauspicious in respect of Rama. Soon thou shalt behold thy son with Sita and Lakshmana. O Sinless Queen, it becomes thee to encourage others, therefore, why dost thou now cause thy heart distress? O Devi, do not grieve, there is none in the world more virtuous than Rama. Seeing Rama returning from the forest with his friends, making obeisance to thee, then wilt thou shed tears of joy, like the clouds in the rainy season. In brief, I tell thee, thy son Shri Rama, returning to the capital, will press thy feet to him with his tender hands. Seeing thy son bowing to thy feet thou wilt cover him with tears as the clouds cover the mountains with rain."

Thus did the beautiful Sumitra, ever persuasive and benevolent to all, offer words of consolation to the Queen Kaushalya and having spoken, became silent. The chief queen, the mother of Shri Rama, hearing the words of Queen Sumitra, found peace and forgot her grief which resembled the rain of the autumn clouds that swiftly disappears.

[1] Lakshmi—The Consort of Shri Vishnu.

CHAPTER 45

The lament of the brahmins who follow Shri Rama

THE people of the capital, deeply devoted to Shri Rama, the Upholder of Truth, followed him on his way to the forest. Though King Dasaratha, on the advice of his ministers, turned back, the citizens of Ayodhya continued to run beside the chariot of Rama. The inhabitants of the city were devoted to Rama whose virtues rendered him resplendent like the full moon, and weeping piteously, implored the holy prince to return, but Rama, determined to prove his father to be true to his word, pressed on towards the forest. They, looking on Rama as a thirsty man looks on water, were addressed by him with tender affection as a father addresses his children.

He said: " O Ye People of Ayodhya, for my sake bestow the love and honour shown to me, in even greater measure, on Bharata! Prince Bharata, who is of an excellent disposition, will assuredly deal benevolently with you and endear himself to you. Though young, he is wise, gentle and endowed with great courage. Warm-hearted and charitable, you will have no cause for fear on his accession to the throne. King Dasaratha has appointed him heir-apparent in consideration of his great virtue, we should therefore obey the king. When I am absent in the forest, you should so act towards him as to occasion him no distress. Do you, desirous of pleasing me, obey the king."

Rama, instructing the people to obey the king again and again only increased their desire to see him as their sovereign. It appeared that Rama with Lakshmana drew the distressed and weeping inhabitants of the city after them as if bound by a cord.

Among the elders in age, wisdom and austerity, the first, their heads trembling with advanced years, calling from a distance, said: " O Ye Swift and Excellent Steeds, return, return, do not proceed further and favour Rama. All beings are endowed with perception, but you excel in the sense of hearing, therefore hear our entreaty and turn back. We know

the heart of our master to be simple and gentle, we know him to be a hero firm in his vows, therefore, return to Ayodhya, do not carry Rama away from the city to the forest."

Hearing the lament of the aged brahmins and perceiving their distress, Shri Rama, causing the chariot to halt, dismounted. With Lakshmana and Sita, he walked towards the forest, followed by the multitude, proceeding slowly on foot. The ever virtuous and compassionate Rama was unable to endure the sight of the aged brahmins walking on foot, far behind the chariot.

The brahmins seeing Rama did not return, despite their supplications, but still proceeded towards the forest, were troubled and overcome with distress, cried: "O Rama, thou art a friend of the brahmins and the whole caste is following thee with the sacred fire borne on their shoulders. See, we are carrying the holy canopies, like autumn clouds, obtained by us by observing the Vaja-peya[1] ceremony. By covering thee with their shade, we will protect thee from the rays of the sun. O Child, formerly thy mind was set on the study of the Veda, but now thou art determined to enter the forest. Our only wealth, the Veda, we have stored in our memory and our consorts are at home, protected by their conjugal devotion. There is no cause for further reflection, we are determined to go with thee! If thou dost not walk in the path of dharma, who will follow it?[2]

"O Rama, what more can be said? We, whose heads are white like swan's down, offer humble salutations to thee. Among us, some have entered upon their sacrifices, O Rama, their completion depends on thee. Not we alone, but beasts, birds and trees, entreat thee to return; have pity on all these. Trees desiring to follow thee, prevented by their roots which penetrate deep into the earth, implore thee not to depart, their branches bending low in the wind. See the birds, forgetting to seek their food, sit motionless on the trees, supplicating thee who art compassionate to all."

Thus lamenting, the brahmins beheld the river Tamasa as if obstructing the path of Rama, preventing his further progress.

[1] Vaja-peya.—A sacrifice at which a drink of this name is prepared for the gods.
[2] That is, show implicit obedience to the brahmins.

Then Sumantra, loosing the tired horses, let them roll on the ground to relieve their fatigue and gave them to drink causing them to bathe in the river, and allowing them to graze on the banks of the Tamasa.

CHAPTER 46

Shri Rama, with Sita and Lakshmana and the charioteer drive on alone to the forest

SHRI RAMA, reaching the beautiful banks of the river Tamasa, gazing on Sita, addressed his brother Lakshmana: "O Son of Queen Sumitra, this is the first night of our exile, there is no cause for anxiety. The forest looks deserted and melancholy, the birds and beasts having retired to rest. Doubtless the capital of Ayodhya with its inhabitants and my royal sire are deeply distressed on account of our departure. The king, seeing in us many virtues, looks on us with deep affection. O Lakshmana, I fear lest my father and my illustrious mother become blind with incessant weeping. Yet Prince Bharata of upright conduct, will assuredly offer consolation to my parents in dutiful and pious words. O Mighty-armed Prince, reflecting on the compassion of Prince Bharata, I have no fear for my parents. O Hero, thou hast done well in accompanying me to the forest, had it not been so, my solicitude for Sita would have been great. O Lakshmana, there is an abundance of roots, fruits and berries here, but to-night I desire to partake of water alone."

Having thus addressed Prince Lakshmana, Shri Rama said to Sumantra: "O Gentle Friend, attend to the horses with great care." The sun having set below the horizon, Sumantra, fastening the horses to a tree, placed tender grass before them, heedful of their welfare. The time of Sandhya[1] having come, the charioteer observed his devotions according to the rules of his caste, then, with the help of Lakshmana, prepared a bed

[1] Sandhya—Evening devotions.

for Rama. Perceiving the bed made with tender leaves, on the banks of the Tamasa, Shri Rama with Sita and Lakshmana rested there.

Finding Shri Rama and Sitá sleeping, Lakshmana, leaving his seat, recounted the excellent virtues of Rama to the charioteer. Lakshmana thus passed the whole night till the sun rose, conversing with Sumantra on the attributes of Rama.

In this manner, on the banks of the Tamasa, among herds of cattle, Shri Rama and those who had followed him, passed the night. At dawn, Shri Rama rose and seeing the people still asleep, said to his virtuous brother Lakshmana :—

" O Lakshmana, see how these people, abandoning their homes and property, to follow us, are sleeping under the trees. It seems that they, vowing to bring us back, will give up their lives rather than be false to their determination. Let us, therefore, O Brother, leave this place before they wake. When we have crossed the Tamasa, there will be no further cause for anxiety. By our silent departure, the people of the capital of King Ikshwaku, will not, like us, be compelled to sleep under the trees. It is the duty of a prince to preserve them from suffering and not make them the companions of his distress."

Shri Lakshmana answered Ramachandra, saying : " O Wise One, I accept thy resolve, let us mount the chariot immediately."

Rama then said to Sumantra : " Speedily prepare the chariot, I will proceed towards the forest, let us therefore depart from hence without delay."

The charioteer, hastily yoking the horses to the chariot, humbly addressed Rama, saying : " O Great Prince, the chariot is now ready, please ascend with Lakshmana and Sita ; may prosperity attend thee."

Shri Rama with his bow, quiver and other weapons, mounted the chariot and passed over the swiftly flowing river. Crossing the Tamasa, at a short distance from the shore, they traversed a rugged path overgrown with briars, and then came to a wide road, where they could travel with ease and which was safe from any danger. To elude the citizens, Shri Rama said to Sumantra: " O Charioteer, drive first towards the south. Having thus

driven for a space, return again, so that no trace of us may be found."

Shri Sumantra, following the instructions of Rama, drove forward, then returning, stood before Rama. The son of Dasaratha, the augmenter of the glory of the house of Raghu, spoke from the chariot, saying: "Now drive towards Tapovana."

Sumantra, turning the chariot towards the north, proceeded in the direction of the forest.

CHAPTER 47

Those who have followed Prince Rama find themselves alone

THE night being over and the day having dawned, the citizens awoke and not beholding Rama, were overwhelmed with grief, not knowing how to act. Seeking here and there, their eyes bathed in tears, they were unable to discover by what path Shri Rama had departed. Wretched and pale with distress, with quivering hearts and utterly dispirited, they broke into piteous exclamations, saying:—

"Cursed be the sleep that veiled our perceptions, now we shall not behold the full chested and large-eyed Rama. How fruitless is our devotion, since Rama has gone to the forest leaving us, his faithful friends, here. Why has Rama who ever treated us as his children, left us to enter the forest? Either we will find death here or go to the Himalayas and perish in the snow. What avails life without Rama? Here is dried wood, let us collect it and kindling a fire, perish in the flames. What shall we say on our return? Shall we tell others we have abandoned the mighty armed Rama, who is free from envy and a votary of truth? Alas! we cannot do so. The wretched city with the women, the aged and the children, seeing us return without Rama, will be plunged in grief. Having abandoned our homes to follow that self-controlled prince, how can we venture to face the people without him?"

Thus lamenting, with uplifted arms, filled with distress, they resembled cows bereft of their young. Following the track of the chariot wheels, they pressed forward, till, losing their trace, they became prostrate with grief. Finding no further path to follow, they turned back crying: "Alas! what shall we do? Fate is against us!" Then, by the way by which they had come, they retraced their steps to Ayodhya.

Shri Rama, failing to return, the people became restless, and seeing the capital cheerless, despondent and sorrow-stricken, they wept, murmuring to each other: "The city, bereft of Rama, has no beauty, it resembles a dried-up river, divested of its snakes by an eagle." As the sky without the moon or the sea without water, so did the city appear to the people, causing their hearts to faint within them.

Sadly entering their magnificent dwellings, afflicted and distraught, they were unable to distinguish one of their own relatives from a stranger.

CHAPTER 48

Ayodhya without Shri Ramachandra is bereft of beauty

THUS afflicted, the people of the capital, their eyes streaming with tears, longed to give up their lives. Having followed Rama to the forest, they became melancholy and appeared to be almost lifeless. In their homes, with their wives and sons, they lamented bitterly. None rejoiced, none were cheerful, none decked out their children to advantage, nor did the women adorn themselves; no fire burnt on the hearth of any home, none was glad to recover the wealth he had lost and none rejoiced at a sudden increase of riches. Mothers found no delight in the return of their first-born after a long absence. Every house was filled with wailing; the husbands returning without Rama were upbraided by their wives with bitter words, as an elephant is goaded by its driver. Everywhere was heard: "Without beholding Ramachandra, of what use to us are our

homes, women, wealth, sons or pleasure? There is only one who is truly virtuous and it is Lakshmana, who has followed Rama and Sita to the forest! How fortunate are those lakes and rivers filled with lotuses, whose waters, Rama, entering to bathe, doth purify! Beautiful forests, rivers with verdant banks, lakes and mountains will be adorned by the presence of Shri Ramachandra. Those mountains visited by Rama, recognizing their beloved guest, will honour him with due hospitality.

"The trees also, their branches laden with flowers and buds, in which the bees are humming and murmuring, will offer their beauty to Rama. The hills will send forth flowers out of season and yield fruit and blossom in his honour. The crystal waterfalls of varied beauty will gush forth from the mountains to give delight to him. The trees, growing on the slope of the mountains, will enchant him. Where Rama is, fear and danger are banished. The heroic sons of King Dasaratha, even now, are but a little distance from us; come let us follow them. There is no happiness save in the service of the holy Feet of that illumined One. Verily he is the only Lord of the world, the Absolute, the Highest State and our sole support."

The women of the city, overcome with grief, addressing their husbands said: "Let us follow Rama, we will serve Shri Sita, you attend on Shri Rama. Remember, Rama will preserve and maintain you in the forest, while Shri Sita will grant support to us. Of what use is life where the heart is restless and the mind bereft of purpose? If Kaikeyi rule the kingdom setting aside the moral law, what delight can we have in children and possessions; even our lives will become valueless. Will Kaikeyi be solicitous on our account, she, who has abandoned King Dasaratha and her son Shri Ramachandra, for the sake of power? We swear by our sons that while we live, we will never be slaves to Kaikeyi. Who can live happily under the rule of that shameless and evil woman who pitilessly exiled the son of the king? Without a ruler the defenceless kingdom will become a prey to every misfortune and perish on account of Kaikeyi's evil deeds. The king will not long survive the exile of Rama and without him the kingdom will be destroyed. Our good karma being exhausted we are miserable; let us either have recourse to poison, or follow Rama, or seek some other place and

live there unknown. By exiling Rama, Sita and Lakshmana, through false means we have been made subject to Bharata's governance as beasts are lead to the slaughter. Shri Rama, a source of delight resembling the full moon, the destroyer of his foes, mighty-armed, Lakshmana's elder brother, whose eyes are like lotuses, who speaks in gentle accents, who is brave, guileless and beloved of the people, will assuredly adorn the forest wheresoever he roams."

The women of the city distressed by their separation from Rama, wept and mourned as do the friends of a dying man. Lamenting thus, the sun set and the night fell, no sacrificial fires were visible, nor did the brahmins, devoted to the study of the Veda, intone the sacred texts, or recite the Puranas, and in no dwelling was any lamp kindled. The city of Ayodhya, stricken and destitute, the stalls of merchandise forsaken, was bereft of beauty like the sky divested of stars. The women of Ayodhya, filled with sorrow as if their own sons or brothers had been banished, wept bitterly, Shri Ramachandra being dearer to them than their own children. In the city, no songs or music was heard, nor was there dancing or any sign of rejoicing. The merchant ceased to expose their merchandise and sat sunk in dejection. Thus Ayodhya, without joy or activity, appeared as desolate as an ocean without water.

CHAPTER 49

The chariot crosses the boundary of Koshala

SHRI RAMA, remembering his father's command, had travelled far through the night. Day dawned while he was still journeying; offering up his morning prayer, he continued on his way, soon reaching the southern boundary of Koshala.

Enjoying the cultivated fields, the forests, and trees laden with blossom, he drove on, drawn by swift horses. As he passed, he heard the people of the villages and hamlets conversing thus: "Woe unto King Dasaratha enslaved by concupiscence.

Ah! how hard is the heart of the wicked Kaikeyi, how cruel her disposition; violating the ancient tradition, she has performed this evil deed, she who has banished the Prince of Light, who is erudite, compassionate and self-controlled. How will the daughter of King Janaka, brought up in ease, endure the hardships of the forest? Alas! The king has no love for his son or he would not have abandoned one so perfect, who is devoted to the welfare of all."

Hearing the words of the villagers, Shri Rama pressed on quickly and crossed the boundary of Koshala. Then fording the river Vedasruti, a pure stream, he proceeded south. After traversing a great distance, he came to the cool waters of the Gaumati flowing towards the sea, with many cows grazing on its banks. The swift steeds, restrained by Rama, crossed this river and then the Syandika, on whose banks peacocks and ducks were heard. Rama here showed Sita the land formerly given by Manu to Ikshwaku, a spacious and open country of many principalities. Then Shri Rama, whose voice resembled an enchanted swan, addressed Sumantra, saying: "O Charioteer, when will the day come, when I, returning from the forest in company with my parents, will sport in the flowering woods of Sarayu? To hunt in the forest is the prerogative of royal sages. It is the favourite pursuit of kings and others also incline to it. I do not deem it evil and desire to engage in it when the season of my austerities is over."

Thus firm in his purpose, Shri Ramachandra continued to converse sweetly with Sumantra.

CHAPTER 50

They reach the river Gunga and meet the chief of ferrymen, Guha

HAVING crossed the boundary of Koshala, Rama, turning his face towards Ayodhya, with joined palms, addressed the city:

" O Ayodhya, Chief of Cities, protected by the kings of the House of Ikshwaku, I take leave of thee and of the gods thy protectors who dwell with thee. Having fulfilled the command of the king, I shall, returning from the forest, again behold thee and my parents."

Then lifting up his arms, Shri Rama, the tears falling from his eyes, addressed the citizens of his father's kingdom: "O Ye Who have treated me with the respect and affection due to a master, it is not meet that you remain with me, now return to your homes and discharge the duties of your households."

Bowing down to Shri Rama, the people circumambulated him with reverence and turned homewards, frequently halting, weeping and lamenting. Shri Rama, seeing them weeping and not yet satisfied with beholding him, told the charioteer to drive on speedily and passed beyond their sight as the sun sinks out of view at the time of evening.

Proceeding on his way, Shri Rama beheld prosperous towns and villages full of men of charitable, righteous and fearless disposition evidenced by the abundance of temples and sacrificial pillars of their cities. The gardens filled with mango trees were enriched by pools of translucent water with carefully tended highways and herds of cattle grazing here and there. Everywhere the recitation of the Veda could be heard. From his chariot, Shri Rama surveyed the Kingdom of Koshala and passed beyond its confines. The sagacious Rama, proceeding through the extensive land inhabited by happy and prosperous people, enriched by pleasant gardens, came to the southern boundary of Koshala and beheld the holy Gunga, adorned by the presence of the sages, with its cool waters flowing in three directions. Near the bank of the sacred river, he saw the beautiful hermitages, frequented by holy men and pools of limpid water visited by celestial nymphs at play. The holy Ganges, honoured by deities, titans, celestial musicians and naiads, that sacred current, displaying innumerable charming vistas, embellished by the gardens of the gods, and which in heaven is named the " Stream of Golden Lotuses ", that holy river, the sound of whose clashing waves resembles deep laughter, which moving rapidly, covered with foam white as snow, flows merrily forwards

and falling from the heights on the rocks below, resembles a maiden's plaited locks ; sometimes made beautiful by whirlpools, here dark and deep, there with the roar of waters, proclaiming the presence of Shri Gunga herself; those sacred waters wherein the celestial beings plunge and swim, where white lotuses float, bordered by high banks or shelving sands ; there, where swans, cranes, and chakur birds are heard, where trees adorn the banks and waterlilies float or fields of lotus flowers whose buds reveal their tender beauty carpet the tide. Sometimes the waters, reddened by the petals of lotuses, make the river appear like a lovely woman attired in a crimson sari ; those sparkling waters, green as emerald, where mighty tuskers sport and also the great guardian elephants of the earth's four quarters, or those bearing the gods, where the sound of Hara ! Hara ! resounds forever. Shri Gunga, beautiful as a woman, tastefully adorned with brilliant gems ; Shri Gunga, enriched with fruit, flowers and birds of every hue, abounding in porpoises, crocodiles and serpents ; that sacred stream, falling from the feet of the Blessed Vishnu, divine and spotless, the destroyer of others' sin, having sported in the locks of Shri Shiva, thereafter descending on earth, through the power of the penance of Bhagiratha.

Shri Rama, proceeding towards the city of Shringavera, seeing the queen of the ocean, the holy Gunga, where the songs of the krauncha bird are heard, watching wave on wave rising on the sacred stream, that mighty warrior, Rama, said to Sumantra : " O Charioteer, let us lodge here. There, under the Ingudi tree,[1] laden with verdant leaves and blossom, let us rest. O Benevolent One, let us linger by the mighty river, whose auspicious waters are worshipped by the gods, the danavas, serpents, beasts and birds, and let us offer homage there."

Sumantra and Lakshmana answering " Be it so ", stayed the chariot under the Ingudi tree.

Arriving there, Shri Rama and Lakshmana descended from the chariot and Sumantra, unyoking the horses, respectfully seated himself facing Rama, at the foot of the tree.

The king of that country was one, Guha, dear to Rama as his own life, by caste a ferryman, but possessing an army and designated " King of Watermen ". Hearing that that Lion

[1] Ingudi tree—sacred Fig Tree.

among men, Shri Rama, had come to his territory, he together with his aged minister and relatives went forth to meet the prince. Shri Rama, seeing the chief of ferrymen, from a distance, went with Lakshmana to meet and welcome him. Perceiving Shri Rama to be in ascetic's garb, Guha, distressed, bowing before him, said: "O Prince, let this small kingdom be as Ayodhya to thee, please issue thy commands, I am at thy service. O Mighty-armed One, it is rare to receive a guest so deeply beloved!"

Guha then brought excellent dishes of delicious foods, together with the arghya and said: "We are thy servants and thou art our lord, accept this kingdom and rule it as thine own. Here are dishes of various kinds, desserts, liquids, spices, excellent beds on which to rest and provender for the horses, all at thy disposal."

Shri Rama answered: "O Guha, thou hast come to welcome me on foot out of affection, by this I am duly honoured, I am pleased with thee." Then taking him in his strong arms and embracing him, Shri Rama addressed him in cheerful accents, saying: "O Guha, through my good fortune I behold thee and thy friends in good health. Is all well among thy people and with thy possessions? O Friend, having renounced the acceptance of gifts, I am not able to partake of what thou hast offered me with love; know that having assumed the robe of kusha grass and the antelope skin, I live on fruit and roots; I am the protector of dharma and my father's servant. Being an ascetic, I may only accept a little grass for the horses and nothing beside—by this alone, I am fully welcomed. These horses of my father Dasaratha are dear to him, they having received oats, grass and pure water, I am honoured in full measure."

On this, Guha commanded his servants to provide drink and provender for the horses. Then Rama assuming a dress of bark performed his evening devotions, drinking the water brought by Shri Lakshmana. Then Lakshmana washed the feet of Rama and Sita who had laid themselves down beneath the Ingudi tree and seated himself respectfully near them. Guha with Sumantra seated near Shri Lakshmana who, armed with bow and arrow, carefully guarded Rama, spent the night in holy converse. Rama, the wise and illustrious son of King Dasaratha, deserving

every comfort and who now, lying on the ground, suffered adversity, passed the night undisturbed in deep sleep.

CHAPTER 51

The night is spent on the bank of the sacred river

GUHA addressed Shri Lakshmana who was humbly guarding his royal brother, and said: " O Friend, rest at ease on this soft bed prepared for thee. We are fitted for the forest life, but thou accustomed to ease, rest now, we will watch during the night and guard Shri Rama from harm, none is dearer to me on earth, I swear to thee in truth. To gratify Shri Rama, I will acquire fame, righteousness, wealth and pleasure.[1] I, with my bow and arrow, attended by my kindred, will watch over Shri Rama, now asleep with Sita. Wandering daily in the forest, nothing there is unknown to me, even if a powerful enemy attacked me in the forest, I could withstand him."

Lakshmana answered: " I have full faith in the power of thy protection, nor do I fear any, but how, forgetful of dharma, can I refrain from watching over Shri Rama? Beholding the chief heir of Dasaratha, sovereign of the earth, lying on the ground with the daughter of King Janaka, how should I dare to rest while he is sleeping? "

See Nishada[2]! That Mighty Prince, Shri Rama, whom none dared challenge, sleeps on a bed of straw. That Great One obtained by King Dasaratha by the merit of charity, austerity and devotion, having become an ascetic, his aged sire will not long survive and then will the earth become a widow. O Nishada, I deem the women wailing and lamenting at our departure have become silent and the royal palace also, but I fear the king, Kaushalya and my mother, will not outlast this night. Consoled by Shatrughna, my mother may endure a little while, but Queen Kaushalya, the mother of this hero,

[1] The four legitimate aims in life.
[2] The Nishada is the mountain tribe to which Guha belonged.

will surely yield up her life without Rama. Alas! Ayodhya, the repository of wealth and inhabited by those who love Rama, will perish through the distress caused by the king's death. How can the king live without beholding his beloved and virtuous eldest son? Queen Kaushalya also will perish, nor can my mother long survive Kaushalya's death. Alas! The whole structure of the king's purpose has fallen in ruins; desiring to appoint Rama as his regent, he will leave this world still cherishing this hope. He is fortunate who, attending the last hours of the king, performs his obsequies—and then ranges the city full of charming courts, palaces and temples with intersecting streets where lovely courtesans are seen; that city abounding in splendid chariots, horses and elephants, resounding with trumpets, possessing every amenity, filled with happy people, enriched by parks and gardens where conferences and joyous gatherings are held daily. When shall we, returning from the forest, walk in the royal city? May King Dasaratha continue to live, so that we may behold that excellent monarch on our return, with Shri Rama the Upholder of Truth."

Thus lamenting and afflicted, Shri Lakshmana, keeping watch over Rama, passed the night. Prince Lakshmana uttering words of truth and affection concerning his parents and elders, spoke thus to Guha who, grieving and disquieted, wept like an elephant in pain.

CHAPTER 52

Sumantra is ordered to return; Shri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana cross the holy river

THE day having dawned, the broad-chested and illustrious Rama addressed the virtuous Prince Lakshmana. "Lo! the goddess Night has fled and the sun is about to rise. O listen how the blackbird is singing and the peacock's cry is heard in the forest. Let us cross the swift-flowing Bhagirathi, which runs towards the sea."

Shri Lakshmana, hearing Shri Rama's command, standing before his brother, called Guha and Sumantra. Guha divining Shri Rama's purpose, summoned his ministers and said to them: "Speedily bring a good boat, stout and strong, capable of taking Shri Rama across."

The minister according to Guha's instruction brought an excellent boat and said: "Sir, the boat is ready." Then Guha, with joined palms, approaching Shri Rama thus addressed him: "O Lord, thy boat is at hand, what further dost thou require of me? O Lion among men, O Prince, O Thou observer of great vows, the boat capable of crossing the river flowing towards the sea, is here, please enter it."

The glorious Prince Rama answered Guha saying: "Thou hast supplied me with all I could desire, now place the baggage on the boat." The princes donning their quivers, and bearing their bows, came to the place where the boat was waiting.

Then Sumantra approaching the righteous Rama with bowed head and joined palms, said: "What commands hast thou for me, O Lord?" Touching Sumantra with his right hand, Shri Rama replied: "O Virtuous Sumantra, now return to the king and serve him with vigilance, I no longer need thee. O Friend, leaving the chariot, I will enter the forest on foot." Sumantra receiving the order to return, imagined himself already separated from Rama and full of grief exclaimed: "O Lord, none in the kingdom desires thee to enter the forest with Sita and Lakshmana like a common man. When I behold thee, compassionate and guileless, facing great adversity, I regard as vain, compassion, simplicity, the brahmacharya vow and the study of the Veda! O Prince, dwelling in the forest with Sita and Lakshmana will bring thee renown equal to one who conquers the three worlds; but we, separated from thee, O Rama, are doomed and will fall under the sway of the sinful Kaikeyi."

The wise Sumantra, certain of Rama's departure, filled with distress, wept long and bitterly. At length, restraining his tears he purified himself with water, and was then addressed by Rama who spoke to him in gentle accents, saying: "Among the ministers of the house of Ikshwaku, none is so kind a friend. Wilt thou, therefore, act in such wise that the king be freed

from grief? The Lord of the earth is aged, his mind confused and he is tormented with desire, therefore I ask thee to minister unto him. Whatever the king commands, through affection for Queen Kaikeyi, do thou perform. Kings rule to fulfil their desires. O Sumantra, act in such a way that the king be not displeased, and that he may not sink under the weight of affliction. When thou dost approach him, who was hitherto a stranger to suffering, offer salutations on my behalf and say: 'Having renounced Ayodhya and entered the forest, Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Sita suffer no distress; fourteen years having passed, thou shalt soon see them return!'

"Deliver thus my message of affection again and again to the king, to my mother Kaushalya, the other queens and also Kaikeyi. Bowing to the feet of my mother Kaushalya, tell her that all is well with me and also with Sita and Lakshmana. Advise the king to send for Bharata speedily and when he is come, let him be installed as regent. Taking Prince Bharata in thine arms, appoint him king; thou shalt thus be freed from the grief caused by this separation. Thereafter, let Bharata, on my behalf be instructed to treat our mothers with equal affection and with the same honour as is due to the king. Let him look on Sumitra and my mother Kaushalya as his own mother Kaikeyi. Do thou say: 'If thou accept the kingdom to please the king, thy fame and happiness in both worlds are assured'."

Having spoken thus, Shri Rama desired to dismiss Sumantra from his presence bearing the message, but the minister, deeply distressed, addressed him, saying: "O Ramachandra, forgive me if I utter words lacking in reverence, urged by my devotion for thee, nor deem me to be a hypocrite. O Raghava, Ayodhya, by thy departure, resembles one afflicted by the loss of a son, how shall I return there without thee? Seeing the chariot without thee, the people will be filled with distress, the heart of the city will be riven in twain. Though thou hast travelled far, yet in the hearts of the citizens of Ayodhya thou art still present with them. Assuredly the people have neither partaken of food nor water in thine absence. At the time of thy departure, O Prince, thou wast acquainted with their grief, and didst witness their weeping and lamentation. On beholding the empty

chariot, their sorrow will be increased a thousandfold. On returning to Ayodhya, with what words shall I address thy mother? Shall I say 'I have left thy son at the home of thy brother, do not grieve.'? How can I utter such a falsehood, yet how can I relate the truth to her? Those noble steeds that have drawn the chariot bearing thee, Lakshmana and Sita, how shall they be driven without thee? O Sinless Prince, I cannot return to Ayodhya without thee, therefore let me remain with thee in the forest. If in spite of my prayer, thou still renouncest me, I will, with the chariot enter a blazing fire. O Prince, whatever beings seek to frustrate thy life of devotion in the forest, I will repel with my chariot. Through thee, I am enabled to drive the chariot, now be gracious enough to let me enter the forest with thee. Accept me, therefore, as thy protector and let me enter the forest, I ask thee with exceeding love. O Hero, should these excellent steeds serve thee in the forest, they will acquire a high spiritual state. O Prince, by whatever means I may serve thee in the forest, I would esteem it more than residence in heaven or in Ayodhya. Without thee, I am unable to return to the capital, as the sinful Indra was unable to enter Amaravati. It is my highest desire when thy period of exile shall be over to convey thee to the capital once more. O Rama, fourteen years with thee will pass like a moment, while without thee, they will seem like a thousand years. O Friend of those devoted to thee, I have resolved to stay in the forest with the son of my lord. How can'st thou abandon thy devoted friend, who only seeks to do his duty?"

Thus repeatedly besought by the minister Sumantra, Shri Rama answered him saying: "O Lover of thy Master, I know of thy devotion to me, but hear the reasons which prompt me to send thee hence to Ayodhya.

"Seeing thee return to the capital, my mother Kaikeyi, convinced I have entered the forest will be satisfied and will no longer reproach the king, charging him with falsehood and unrighteousness. I desire that my mother Kaikeyi should enjoy the prosperous kingdom governed by her son Bharata, therefore, to please me, return to the capital and deliver the message with which I have entrusted thee."

Thus Rama, offering explanation to Sumantra then spoke

words of reason and encouragement to Guha, saying: "O Guha, it is not proper for me to dwell in the forest in which my friends reside, therefore, constructing a hut of leaves and twigs elsewhere I will live as an ascetic. For the spiritual welfare of my father, I, Sita and Lakshmana, with matted hair following the ascetic discipline, will reside in the forest. Bring me, therefore, the milk of the Bhurja tree.[1] Guha obeyed the instruction of the prince, whereupon Rama poured the viscous liquid on his own head and also on the head of Lakshmana! Thus Shri Rama, that Lion among men, and his brother Lakshmana appeared as ascetics and in their robes of bark with matted locks looked charming. Taking the vow of brahmacharya, the two brothers addressed Guha saying: "O Guha, do not neglect thine armies, thy treasury, thy forces of defence and thy people. A kingdom is governed through diligence and exertion."

Taking leave of Guha, Shri Rama with Sita and Lakshmana went quickly towards the Ganges. Seeing the boat near the bank of the swiftly flowing river and desirous of crossing over it, Rama said to Lakshmana: "O Lion among men, hold the boat firm and aid the gentle Sita to board it, then you, too, enter it."

Acting on his brother's command, Shri Lakshmana first assisted the daughter of the King of Mithila and then boarded the boat himself. Then the resplendent Rama followed, being the last to enter and Guha ordered his servants to row them over the sacred river.

Occupying his seat in the boat, Prince Rama began to recite the Vedic mantra for the safe conduct of all. Performing the Achmana[2] ritual, he offered salutations to Shri Gunga and Lakshmana also made obeisance to the sacred stream. Shri Rama once more bade farewell to the charioteer, the army and Guha, and asked the helmsman to row to the other side. The boat moved swiftly to the sound of the oars.

Arriving in midstream, the delighted Sita, with joined palms, adored Shri Gunga, saying: "O Gunga, may this son of Dasaratha, obeying the commands of his father, be protected by thee. May he, passing fourteen years in the forest, return again with Lakshmana and myself. Then, O Devi, O Blessed

[1] Bhurja tree—a species of birch.
[2] Achmana—a purificatory ceremony.

Gunga, returning with them, I will worship thee. O Gunga, thou art the fulfiller of pious desires. O Thou Tripartite Goddess, reaching to the abode of Brahma, and appearing in the mortal realm as the consort of the ocean king, O Beautiful One, I bow down to thee and adore thee. When, returning safely from the forest, Shri Rama occupies the throne, then I, desiring to gratify thee, will give a hundred thousand cows, abundant grain and beautiful apparel to the brahmins in charity. Returning to Ayodhya, I will offer a sacrifice of a hundred jars of wine and rice to thee. I will worship all the gods dwelling on thy banks and all the sacred places such as Prayaga and Kashi. O Sinless One, grant that Rama and Lakshmana, free from sin, completing the term of their exile, return again to Ayodhya."

Thus worshipping the Gunga, the Promoter of delight, they reached the further bank. Then Rama, chief of men, leaving the boat on the southern shore, proceeded to the forest with Lakshmana and Janaki, and addressed Shri Lakshmana, saying: " O Son of Sumitra, do thou carefully protect Shri Sita in the lonely and also the frequented areas of the forest. We must guard her in this unknown and uninhabited place, therefore, O Lakshmana, do thou go before and let Sita follow thee, I will walk behind to safeguard you both, let us defend each other, O Prince. So far, Shri Sita has not made trial of her strength, but from to-day she must endure the hardships of a forest life. To-day, the daughter of King Janaka will enter the forest where no man dwells, nor are there fields or gardens there, but hard and arid ground with yawning chasms everywhere."

Shri Lakshmana, thus instructed, went ahead with Sita following him, Shri Rama coming after.

Meantime, Sumantra, on the further bank, followed Raghava with his eyes, and overcome with grief, wept bitterly. Shri Rama, resplendent as the earth's guardians, giver of boons, having crossed the river Gunga, came to the land of Batsya.

Thereafter, the two brothers hunted the deer and wild boar, and other beasts and growing hungry, fed on roots and berries, as ordained, resting at eventide beneath a tree.

CHAPTER 53

Determined to follow their destiny they enter upon exile

THE Delighter of the World, Shri Rama, sitting beneath a tree performed his evening devotion (Sandhya) and then addressed Shri Lakshmana thus: " O Brother, this is our first night in the forest without Sumantra, do not be dispirited. From now on at night but one of us shall sleep, since the protection of Shri Sita is our care. O Lakshmana, gathering leaves and grass, let us prepare a bed and lay ourselves down."

Shri Rama, accustomed to a sumptuous and princely couch, lay that night on the bare earth. Conversing with Shri Lakshmana, he said: " O Lakshmana, it may be that King Dasaratha slept fitfully this day, but Kaikeyi having realised her ambition, is surely satisfied. I fear that she, avid for the kingdom, will slay the king 'ere Bharata returns. The aged monarch is defenceless, a slave to Kaikeyi and subject to desire; bereft of me, how will the wretched king safeguard himself? Viewing the king's downfall and his subjection in matters of desire, it would seem that concupiscence is more powerful than wealth or virtue. O Brother, what foolish man, swayed by a woman, would abandon an obedient son like me? Bharata alone is fortunate, who, with his consort, having acquired Ayodhya, will enjoy the kingdom.

" Prince Bharata will become the ruler of the whole empire since the life of the king is drawing to its close and I have entered the forest. He who gives up righteousness and disregarding prosperity, seeks to gratify his desires, like King Dasaratha, falls a prey to sorrow. O Handsome Prince, I deem that Kaikeyi entered our house to destroy the king, to send me into exile and to install Bharata as ruler of the kingdom. O Brother, I fear that Kaikeyi, blinded by power, may persecute Kaushalya and Sumitra, they being our mothers. Do thou, lest Kaushalya and Sumitra suffer, go to Ayodhya, for my sake. I, with Sita, will enter the Dandaka forest. Go thou to Ayodhya and become the protector of the defenceless Queen Kaushalya. The evilly-disposed Kaikeyi, through enmity to us, may cause

injury to our mothers. O Lakshmana, assuredly in some previous birth, my mother has deprived other women of their sons and is reaping the fruit of that action in this life. Woe unto me, that I should have to abandon my mother who nurtured me with exceeding love and should now enjoy felicity. O Lakshmana, may no woman give birth to a son like me, who am the source of infinite distress to my mother. O Brother, a maina[1] taught by me, cried in the hearing of my mother, 'Bite the enemy's foot while you are in his mouth'.[2] O Lakshmana, my unfortunate mother is to-day sunk in an ocean of grief and I am not able to succour her. Better it were that she had had no son! Assuredly she is an object of compassion, mourning in my separation. Alas! what extremity of grief is hers to-day! O Lakshmana, should I give way to wrath, I were able to subdue the world not to speak of Ayodhya, but for the upholding of righteousness, I may not demonstrate my power. Should I do so, I should incur sin and endanger the life hereafter; never will I take the kingdom by force."

Thus lamenting in the lonely forest, Rama, abandoning restraint, passed the night in tears.

When, ceasing to lament, Lakshmana beheld Rama like an extinguished fire or a calm sea, he thus addressed him: "O Great Hero, deprived of thee, Ayodhya is without splendour, as the night, at the setting of the sun, but, O Rama, it is unworthy of thee to grieve, sapping the courage of Sita and myself. Like fish without water, we cannot live an instant without thee. O Great One, I do not desire to see my father, my brother Shatrughna or my mother Sumitra, nor even heaven itself."

Hearing the words of Lakshmana, full of good counsel, Shri Ramachandra arose and seated himself by Sita on the bed of leaves. Determined to follow his destiny, Shri Rama entered upon the period of exile. From that day, the two great princes of the house of Raghu dwelt in the lonely forest, serene and fearless like two lions dwelling on the summit of a mountain.

[1] Maina or Mina—a small percha, the size of a sparrow, able to repeat words.
[2] The meaning is Rama had a bird which was taught to speak. Seeing a parrot caught by a hawk, it cried out: "O, Parrot, bite the enemy's foot." (That is, before you are devoured.)

CHAPTER 54

They spend the night at Prayaga in the hermitage of the Sage Bharadwaja

As the sun rose in a cloudless sky, having passed the night under a banyan tree, they set out from thence and proceeded to where the Gunga and the Yamuna meet, flowing through the vast forest. The two illustrious brothers journeying onwards beheld beautiful vistas in the forest, hitherto unseen by them, and they, sometimes reclining at ease, delighted in the blossoming trees. The day being nearly over, Shri Rama said to the son of Sumitra: " O Lakshmana, look towards Prayaga,[1] smoke is rising like the fire-god's banner; undoubtedly, it is a sign that the hermitage of holy Bharadwaja is near. We have assuredly reached the junction of the Gunga and Yamuna, the sound of these mighty rivers clashing together is clearly heard. Wood-cutters have hewn the logs from mighty trees and many are cut down in the hermitage of the holy sage." Conversing thus, as the sun was setting, the two great archers reached the confluence of the Gunga and Yamuna, and the hermitage of Bharadwaja. Desiring to look upon the holy sage, they halted respectfully at some little distance from the place. Then Rama slowly and reverently entered the hermitage, beholding there the omniscient Sage Bharadwaja of mighty vows, the conqueror of time by sacred discipline. Surrounded by his disciples, offering oblations into the holy fire, they beheld the rishi, and Rama with Sita and Lakshmana paid obeisance to him. Rama said : " O Blessed and Mighty Sage, we are Rama and Lakshmana, the sons of King Dasaratha, and this, my wife, is the daughter of Videha's King, this fortunate one is following me to the lonely Tapovana. My royal sire has sent me into exile and the son of Sumitra, my younger brother, ever dear to me, taking the brahmacharya vow, has followed me. O Blessed Lord, fulfilling the behests of our father, we shall enter the sacred forest and, practising dharma, live on roots and berries."

[1] Prayaga—The confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna, a sacred spot.

The virtuous sage, Bharadwaja, hearing the words of Prince Rama, offering them madhuparka[1] together with the arghya, and water wherewith to wash their feet, thereafter gave them various roots and fruits. Then the holy sage prepared a resting place for them. The Maharishi Bharadwaja, seated amidst the deer and birds, thus honoured Rama, enquiring as to his welfare. Rama receiving the worship of the great rishi, reflected on the words spoken to him: "O Prince, I behold thee after a long time, I have heard that thou wast exiled without cause. Remain here at ease and in peace, at this sacred and pleasant place where the two great rivers meet."

Shri Rama, ever devoted to the good of all, answered: "O Lord, thy hermitage is close to the abodes of men and many will come hither to gaze on Sita and myself. I therefore do not deem it wise to linger here. O Blessed One, do thou inform me of a lonely place, where Sita, the daughter of Janaka, may live in happiness."

In gentle accents Shri Bharadwaja replied: "O Child, ten miles from here, there is a mountain, purified by the presence of many sages who dwell there, beautiful and pleasing to the sight, there do thou abide. Monkeys, bears and chimpanzees wander there freely. That mountain is Chittrakuta, delightful as Gandhamadana. Those beholding the peaks of Chittrakuta, obtain spiritual merit, their minds admit no sin and, living there, they win divine rewards. Many sages, performing austerities there for thousands of years, have entered heaven in their embodied state. O Rama, this lovely place is a fit residence for thee, I deem, if thou will not remain here with me until the period of thine exile be past." Thus Bharadwaja honoured Rama with Sita and Lakshmana offering them every mark of hospitality due to their royal state. So in the hermitage of the great sage at Prayaga, Rama spent the night in converse on ancient times. Relieved of weariness, Shri Rama with Lakshmana and Sita passed the night pleasantly in the sacred hermitage. When morning dawned, Shri Ramachandra, approaching the great sage made resplendent by virtue of austere practices, thus addressed him: "O Thou devoted to truth,

[1] Madhuparka—A traditional offering, a mixture of curds, butter, honey and the milk of coconut.

we have passed the night at ease in thy hermitage now grant us leave to depart to the place appointed by thee."

Shri Bharadwaja then made answer. " O Rama, set out for the mountain Chittrakuta abounding in honey, roots and fruit, worthy to be thy dwelling, covered with trees and the abode of heavenly beings; there, peacocks cry and mighty tuskers roam. Go then to that sacred place, which is pleasant and filled with fruit and flowers, and where elephants and deer wander through the woods. There, lingering with Sita by the springs and waterfalls, the mountain slopes and peaceful caves, thy mind will find delight. O Rama, do thou depart to dwell on that high and lovely mountain thronged with elephants and various beasts, where the tittibha[1] and the kokila[2] sing."

CHAPTER 55

They cross the Yamuna and travel on

SHRI RAMA and Lakshmana, the conquerors of their foes, having passed the night in Prayaga, offered obeisance to the sage and proceeded towards Chittrakuta. On their departure, Shri Bharadwaja gave them his blessing as a father blesses his son and addressing Rama, that hero of the region of truth, said:

" O Great One, proceeding west of the junction of the rivers, on the bank of the Yamuna, which flows into the swiftly-moving Gunga, thou wilt find a worn-out ferryboat. Do thou pass over the stream by means of a rod to which, at either end, an upturned pitcher is hung. On the opposite shore, thou wilt behold a mighty green-leaved fig-tree surrounded by many others. The leaves of this tree are of a dark green hue and it is frequented by siddhas. Reaching that place, do thou, with Janaki pray for the accomplishment of thy legitimate desires. Rest there awhile, then pass beyond it; reaching Nilvan at a mile's distance, there many sala, jamnu and badri[3] trees are seen,

[1] Tittibha—A bird Parra Jacana or Goensis.
[2] Kokila—The black or Indian cuckoo.
[3] Sala, jamnu and badri trees—for trees see separate glossary.

that is the way to Chittrakuta and often have I journeyed on that path. Beautiful it is and free from thorns and there is no danger there of a forest fire."

After pointing out the way to Shri Rama, the sage turned back to his own hermitage.

Offering salutations to the saint, Shri Rama, having taken his leave, said to Lakshmana: " O Lakshmana, surely we are fortunate in that the holy Rishi has treated us so graciously."

Conversing thus, the two princes proceeded onwards, Shri Sita walking before them, and came to the bank of the swiftly-flowing Yamuna. Then they began to consider how they should pass over it, and collecting some wood constructed a raft, tying together lengths of dried bamboo and filling the interstices with kusha grass. Then Lakshmana, spreading the branches of jambu and vettas trees, made Sita a comfortable seat. Shri Sita shyly holding the hand of her lord, Shri Rama placed his Beloved on the raft with her clothing and ornaments beside her. Thereafter placing the axes and the chest covered with deerskins, containing their weapons there, the two brothers began to sail. Arriving in mid-stream, Shri Sita, bowing low, prayed to the holy river saying: " O Devi, forgive us for passing over thee, grant that my lord may fulfil his vow without obstructions. When I return, to please thee I will offer a thousand cows in charity." Then with joined palms, she said: " May the Lord of the House of Ikshwaku return in peace to the capital."

Having crossed the rippling Yamuna, the swift daughter of the sun, they reached its southern bank; there abandoning the raft, they entered the woods and the river bank and came to the heavily shadowed fig tree.

Shri Sita said: " O Mighty Tree, I make obeisance to thee, may my lord fulfil his vow, so that I may again behold Shri Kaushalya and Queen Sumitra."

Then Sita circumambulated the tree with reverence and Rama beholding the lovely Sita praying for his welfare, said to Lakshmana: " Do thou go forward with Sita of whom no ill word has ever been uttered, who is ever obedient to me and is dearer than life itself. O Chief of Men, I, with my weapons will follow after. Whatever fruit or flower the daughter of

Janaka may desire in the forest, do thou gather for her, so that her mind may find delight."

Shri Sita, between the two princes, walked like a female elephant guarded by two tuskers; the daughter of Janaka, beholding many things, formerly unknown to her, questioned Rama concerning every tree, shrub and climbing plant. Seeing many beautiful trees covered with blossom, Shri Lakshmana brought the princess all she desired. Viewing the river and its sandy banks caressed by the waves, where swans and cranes called, Shri Sita was filled with happiness.

Having travelled some distance, the two valiant brothers slew many deer for food, then, with Sita, passed through the pleasant woods, ringing with the cries of peacocks and frequented by elephants and monkeys.

Perceiving a delightful and sheltered place which found favour with Sita, they lodged there free from fear.

CHAPTER 56

They reach the mountain Chittrakuta and build a hut

THE night being past, Shri Rama, slowly waking, roused the sleeping Lakshmana and addressed him, saying: "O Lakshmana, how beautiful are the parrots, cuckoos, mainas and other birds which are heard here! O Parantapa,[1] this is the hour to pursue our journey, let us go hence, O Prince!"

Shri Lakshmana, renouncing sleep, shook off his drowsiness and rose refreshed. All of them rising and bathing in the river Yamuna, offered up their morning prayers. Then, taking the path through the palasa[2] forest, they proceeded towards Chittrakuta as directed by the holy sage.

Walking with Lakshmana, Rama now spoke to the lotus-eyed Sita, saying: "O Daughter of King Videha, see how the spring has dressed the palasa trees in sweet-scented blossom, these

[1] Parantapa—Oppressor of the enemy.
[2] Palasa or Palasha or Panasa—bread fruit.

crimson flowers glowing like fire and the branches decked with flowers as if adorned with garlands. How rich in bloom are the bilwa[1] trees untouched by man who is not able to approach them. Here we can easily gather food. See, O Lakshmana, hanging on the trees, the honeycombs at least a drona[2] in size, covered with bees. How charmingly the waterbird is singing and the peacock answering with its call, and look! the earth is half concealed with flowers. Here are the lofty peaks of Chittrakuta where countless birds sing and herds of elephants wander. Somewhere on Chittrakuta a level field must lie midst groves of trees, a pure and stainless place, where we will dwell."

The two brothers, in company with Sita, conversing thus, reached the pleasant and captivating mountain of Chittrakuta. Coming to that place, on which there were birds of many kinds, abounding in various roots and pleasant fruits and clear transparent pools, Rama said to Lakshmana: "O Gentle Brother, how pleasant is this hill covered with shady trees, creepers and fruits of many kinds, appearing delightful and where we may abide unmolested. Within the forest, many sages dwell, this place is meet to be our hermitage."

Thus resolving, Rama, Lakshmana and Sita came to the hermitage of the Sage Valmiki and, with reverence, offered obeisance to him. The virtuous sage, full of joy, paid homage to them, asking them to be seated saying: "You are most welcome!"

Shri Rama, presenting himself together with his brother and Sita, related the cause of his exile to the sage and then addressed Lakshmana, saying: "O Brother, bring strong wood and let us build a hut in this place. O Excellent Prince, here do I wish to dwell."

Shri Lakshmana thereupon brought many pieces of wood, hewn from the trees, and erected a hut thatched with leaves. When Shri Rama beheld that firm and pleasant hut furnished with a door, he said to the devoted Lakshmana: "O Lakshmana, bring venison with which we may worship the deity of the dwelling-place! Since we purpose to live here long, we should enter it with peaceful intention! O Son of Sumitra, having

[1] Bilwa—bel tree or wood apple.—Aegle Marmelas.
[2] Drona — a measure of corn approximately 92 pounds.

killed a black deer, bring it here speedily. Let us follow the scriptural ordinance in this matter."

Shri Lakshmana, having obeyed his brother's command, Rama said: "Now dress the meat and we will offer it as a sacrifice. Hasten, O Brother, this is an auspicious hour."

The illustrious son of Sumitra slew a black antelope and roasted it in the flames. When it was dressed and the blood drained from it, Lakshmana addressed Raghava, saying: "O Godlike One, I have prepared the flesh of the black deer, now offer up the sacrifice to propitiate the god."

The devout and resplendent Rama, skilled in silent prayer and sacrifice, having bathed, recited the holy texts, offering homage to the gods, then entered the hut, his heart filled with joy. Having adored Rudra and Vishnu for the purification of the dwelling, he read the Peace Chant and other propitiatory prayers. Repeating the japa[1] and bathing in the river, he offered oblations for the expiation of sins. He then erected altars in the eight directions for the worship of different gods and gratifying the deities presiding over the elements with offerings of flowers, garlands, fruits, cooked meats and the recitation of Vedic mantrans, he, together with Sita, entered the delightful hut, thatched with leaves, set up in a suitable place, sheltered from the wind.

Shri Rama, of subdued senses, dwelt happily in that habitation, built in the forest, the abode of beasts and birds, abounding in trees and flowers, where elephants wandered and the cries of wild beasts re-echoed.

Living on the pleasant mountain, Chittrakuta, by the banks of the river Malati, Rama forgot the capital and remembered his renunciation no more.

[1] Japa — silent prayer—usually the repetition of a sacred formula.

CHAPTER 57

Sumantra returns to the stricken city of Ayodhya

SEPARATED from Rama, Guha was filled with distress. Conversing long with the charioteer, he perceived Rama reach the southern shore, and turned homewards.

Sumantra hearing fully from the men of Shrangverpira of Rama's arrival at Prayaga, his meeting and residence with the Rishi Bharadwaja and his journey towards Chittrakuta, bade farewell to Guha and yoking his horses to the chariot, with a sorrowful heart, started for Ayodhya. Speedily passing through flower-laden forests and viewing the rivers, pools, villages and towns, he reached the stricken city of Ayodhya on the evening of the third day. Seeing the silent city, he reflected: "Has the city with its sovereign, men, elephants and horses been consumed by the fire of grief, caused by the separation from Rama?"

Pondering thus, in his swiftly borne chariot, Sumantra reached the gate of the inner city and entered it. There innumerable people rushed towards the chariot and surrounding it, cried: "Where is Shri Rama?" "Where is Shri Rama?" and Sumantra answered: "Having reached the banks of the Gunga, the virtuous Rama ordered me to return, therefore, I have come." Then the people, finding Rama had crossed the sacred river, their eyes filled with tears, sighing heavily, cried: "O Rama, O Rama!" and all exclaimed with one voice, "Alas! We are deprived of the sight of Rama, we are destroyed! We shall no more behold Rama, the distributor of gifts and performer of sacrifices, who sat in our assemblies and who resembled the beautifully adorned Meru mountain! Alas! Where is Shri Rama, our protector, acquainted with the need of each and the happiness of all!"

Then Sumantra, proceeding further, heard on every side, through the lattices of the houses the wailing of women mourning for Rama and hearing their lamentations on the royal highway, the charioteer, covering his face, passed quickly on towards the palace of the king.

Descending with all speed from his chariot, he passed beyond the seven gates and entered the royal residence. Seeing Sumantra return alone, the women, seated at the balconies and windows of the palace, seven-stories high, languishing in Rama's separation, broke into loud lamentations. Exchanging glances, their eyes streaming with tears, in broken accents they gave expression to their grief. He heard, too, the feeble wailing of the queens of King Dasaratha, saying : " What will Sumantra, who went forth with Rama and has returned alone, say to the stricken Queen Kaushalya ? Surely the human soul suffers pain and anxiety more readily than joy, since Queen Kaushalya still lives separated from Rama."

Hearing the words of the queens and weighed down with sorrow, Sumantra entered the residence of the king and passing through the eighth door beheld in the white chamber, the wretched king, disconsolate and wasted with grief on account of his son. Approaching the king seated there, Sumantra making obeisance to him delivered the message entrusted to him by Shri Rama.

The king heard it in silence, his mind agitated with pain and grief and fell unconscious to the earth. The queens, seeing the king fallen in a swoon, lifted him in their arms and covered him with tears. Kaushalya and Sumitra raising the fallen monarch from the ground addressed him, saying : " O Thou Fortunate One, why dost thou not answer the messenger of Rama who has accomplished his arduous task ? O King, having exiled Rama, why art thou now full of shame ? Arise, there is no cause for this distress. O Lord, Queen Kaikeyi is not here, in fear of whom thou dost not dare address Sumantra. Speak without fear."

Thus exhorting the king, Queen Kaushalya fell insensible, her throat choked on account of her grief.

The ladies of the court and the other queens, perceiving Kaushalya lying on the ground lamenting, began to weep aloud. Then all the people of Ayodhya, old and young, hearing the wailing from the inner apartments of the palace, broke into lamentation, as on the day when Rama had left the city.

CHAPTER 58

He delivers Shri Rama's message to the king

THE king, recovering consciousness after a while, summoned the royal charioteer and turned his gaze upon him. Sumantra reverently approached the aged monarch who was grieving and restless, and sighing heavily like a newly-captured elephant. Then the afflicted sovereign spoke to Sumantra who was most miserable, his body covered with dust, his eyes suffused with tears, and said: "O Charioteer, that virtuous one, worthy of every comfort and happiness will now be seeking refuge under a tree. O! What will be his food? How will Rama, the son of King Dasaratha, who merits no suffering, who is worthy of resting on a royal couch, sleep as one orphaned, on the bare earth? How can that prince, formerly accompanied by soldiers and elephants, and whose chariot was drawn by matchless steeds, now sleep in the lonely forest? How will Rama and Sita be able to dwell in the forest abounding with pythons and other wild beasts? O Sumantra, how can the tender and sorrow-stricken Sita with the two princes, abandoning the chariot, walk barefooted in the forest? O Charioteer, thou art fortunate in that thou hast seen the two princes wandering in the forest like the Ashwini Kumaras on the mountain Mandara. O Sumantra, when they entered the forest, what did Rama say? What did Lakshmana say? What did Sita say? O Charioteer, tell me fully of Rama's dwelling, his sleeping and his eating, thus shall I live a little longer, like King Yayati of old, on hearing the words of the sadhus."

Thus questioned by his royal master, Sumantra, his throat choked, his speech broken by sobs, replied: "O Great King, Shri Rama, the Upholder of righteousness, reverently joining his palms and bowing his head, said: 'On my command, offer salutations again and again to the most praiseworthy sovereign, renowned far and wide in the world as highly virtuous, and to all the men and women of the inner apartment, carry tidings of my welfare with salutations befitting their rank. Convey the news of my welfare to my mother Kaushalya, with my

deepest respect and admonish her not to neglect her duty. Let her practise dharma and tend the sacrificial pavilion. Say to her: 'O Goddess, honour the king, my father, as thou wouldst a God. Abandoning family pride and royal prerogative, serve my other mothers attentively. Kaikeyi is the king's favourite, do thou attend to her as to the king himself.' "

"O King, Shri Rama has instructed Prince Bharata thus: 'Let it be known to the prince, that I am well and instruct him to treat all his mothers with justice. Tell the illustrious Prince Bharata that, though regent, he must continue in obedience to his royal father. The king is far advanced in years, let not Prince Bharata proclaim himself king. Let him obey the king and act as co-adjutor.'" "Shri Rama charged me with tears, saying: 'Let Bharata look upon my beloved mother as his own.' The mighty armed and highly illustrious Rama of lotus eyes addressing me thus, wept aloud.

"Then Shri Lakshmana growing wrath and sighing heavily, said: 'What fault has this noble prince committed to be exiled? Assuredly the king has agreed to the foolish desire of Queen Kaikeyi, granting her boons without considering if they were proper or improper, through which we are all involved in misery. If Rama has suffered exile to satisfy the stupidity of Queen Kaikeyi, then assuredly it is an evil act. Even if the gods decreed the exile of Rama, I see no reason for it. Acting with imperfect understanding the king regardless of consequences has banished Rama which will surely cause him untold suffering. I see no parental affection in the king; to me Shri Ramachandra is brother, master, relative and father. The darling of the whole world, Shri Ramachandra, devoted to the good of all, has been banished, how can the people approve this act? Having, in opposition to the will of the people, exiled Shri Ramachandra, who is virtuous and beloved, how can he claim to be a king?

"The sagacious Janaki, O King, stood mute, her eyes fixed and vacant, like one possessed by a spirit. That illustrious daughter of Janaka, unacquainted with suffering, wept with grief and was unable to speak. Seeing the countenance of her lord wet with tears, her mouth became parched, and gazing at me, she wept bitterly. Thus Shri Rama, his face drawn with

grief, supported by Lakshmana, addressed me, seated in the royal chariot, while the ascetic Sita fixed her gaze on me in silence."

CHAPTER 59

The king bewailing the absence of Rama is drowning in a sea of sorrow

SUMANTRA said : " O King, when Shri Rama entered the forest, I returned and the weary horses halting, stood still, showing signs of distress. Offering obeisance to the two princes, I mounted the chariot and restraining my grief, went forward, remaining a few days with Guha, in the hope that Shri Rama might call me again and take me with him.

" O King, turning homewards, I beheld the very trees filled with distress, their tender shoots, buds and flowers being withered ! The water in the pools and rivers was slowly ebbing away, the leaves in the woods were falling and the beasts were motionless, the restless elephants no longer wandered here and there. Afflicted by Rama's separation, the forest had become silent. O King, the waters in the ponds had grown turbid and the lotuses had submerged themselves, being unable to bear the severance from Rama. The fishes and water fowl had deserted their accustomed haunts and the aquatic plants and those that grew on land no longer gave forth their fragrant scents, while their fruits were devoid of taste. Gardens were bereft of beauty and birds sat motionless in the woods.

" Entering Ayodhya, none appeared to be happy and the citizens beholding the royal chariot without Rama were perpetually sighing. O Lord, seeing, from a distance, the chariot returning without Rama, all were plunged in grief. The women of the city, from their windows, balconies and roofs, seeing the chariot without Rama, broke into lamentation. With tears falling from their unpainted eyes, full of distress, they withdrew their gaze from all. To-day, I am unable to distinguish friend or foe

owing to grief. All men together with elephants and horses, join in the suffering and mourning, all are afflicted in Rama's separation! The city of Ayodhya, neglected and wretched, resembles Queen Kaushalya bereft of her son!"

Hearing these words, the king became agitated and in trembling accents addressed the charioteer: "O Sumantra, deeply penitent am I, that without deliberating with my able counsellors and elders, I granted the boons to the evil-minded Kaikeyi, under the sway of Manthara. This unpremeditated act was performed by me, inspired by my desire for Kaikeyi, without consultation with my friends and ministers. O Sumantra, this great calamity is the result of fate and will destroy the House of Ikshwaku. O Charioteer! If I have ever done any good to thee, then take me to Shri Ramachandra soon; my life is fast ebbing from my body, or do thou go to the forest and cause Rama to return, if he be still obedient to me. If that Mighty One be gone far from here, then take me in the chariot and drive there speedily; I desire to look on him but once more. Where is Rama, the elder brother of Lakshmana, whose teeth resemble the water lilies and who is a mighty warrior? If I am to live, I must see that virtuous one. If I do not behold Rama with reddened eyes, wearing beautiful earrings, set with jewels, I shall assuredly perish. O! What can exceed my pain, that, at the moment of death, I am unable to see Rama, the hero of the House of Ikshwaku? O Rama, O Lakshmana, O Patient Sita, you do not know that I am dying in bitter anguish."

The king, his mind drowned in the sea of sorrow, cried: "O Kaushalya, that ocean of misery caused by Rama's separation is fathomless, severance from Sita are its shores, deep sighs are the whirlpools rendered turbid by my tears, the stretching of the arms are its restless motion, lamentations are the sound of its thunder, dishevelled hair are the weeds, the words of Manthara are the crocodiles and Kaikeyi is the fire in its depths, the unscaleable cliffs are the boons which sent Rama to the forest. Without Rama, I am sinking in this bottomless sea, living, I am unable to cross over it. I desire to see Rama and Lakshmana this day, but alas! I am unable to obtain my desire, as a result of some great sin formerly committed by me."

Thus complaining, the king fell senseless on the couch. The

monarch, bewailing the absence of Rama, swooned away. Hearing the king's words, the mother of Rama, Queen Kaushalya, was seized with fear.

CHAPTER 60

The charioteer attempts to console Queen Kaushalya

QUEEN KAUSHALYA, lying trembling on the ground like one dead or possessed by an evil spirit, now said to the charioteer: "O Sumantra, take me to the place where Rama, Lakshmana and Janaki dwell! Life without them, even for a moment, is vain. Speedily return there in thy chariot, either I must follow them or enter the region of death."

Shri Sumantra, weeping and distressed, respectfully sought to console the Queen, saying: "O Lady, abandon disquiet, infatuation and anxiety born of grief! Shri Rama will live happily in the forest! Prince Lakshmana, self-subdued, serving Rama and living in accordance with virtue will fashion for himself an auspicious future. In the solitary forest, Shri Sita, her mind wholly centered on Rama in devotion, will live without fear, as in her own home. I see no lack of courage in Princess Sita, it would appear that she was born to reside in a strange land. As in former days, she enjoyed the parks and gardens, so does she now enjoy the uninhabited forest. Sita, whose countenance resembles the full moon, her mind absorbed in Rama, depending on him, sports in the forest; with her heart and mind centred on him, she would hold this great capital no better than a wilderness without Rama. Walking in the forest, seeing the villages, rivers, towns and various kinds of trees, she enquires of Rama concerning their history and origin. To her, the forest is a pleasure garden in the neighbourhood of Ayodhya. This I remember of Sita, but what she said of Kaikeyi now slips my mind."

Sumantra, carefully withholding the reference to Kaikeyi which had escaped from him through inadvertence and in order

to propitiate Queen Kaushalya, addressed her further, saying: "The lustre of the face of Janaki is not marred by the fatigue of the journey or the winds or through fear of dangerous beasts or through the heat of the sun. The countenance of the Princess, resembling the full moon is not impaired by residence in the forest. Her feet, no longer painted with vermilion, appear as fresh as lotuses.

The princess ever exceedingly devoted to Rama, has not put off her ornaments, but with her tinkling anklets trips happily along, causing the very swans to envy her. Depending on the power of Shri Rama, she suffers no fear at the sight of a lion or tiger in the forest. O Lady, there is no cause for grief for these three or for the king or thyself. The self-imposed exile of Shri Rama, in obedience to his father's command, will remain a subject for veneration to the whole world, as long as the sun and moon abide. Having banished sorrow, Shri Rama pursuing the path trodden by the sages, living on fruits and berries, fulfils the behest of his sire."

Though consoled by the charioteer, Queen Kaushalya, torn with grief, in the separation from her son, cried out: "O My Darling, O My Son, O Rama," and continued to weep.

CHAPTER 61

Queen Kaushalya reproaches the king

THE virtuous Rama, the upholder of dharma, having departed, Queen Kaushalya weeping bitterly, addressed her royal consort: "O King, Thy fair name is known throughout the three worlds; thou art esteemed compassionate, charitable and of gentle speech. Yet, O Great One, tell me, how will thy two sons, brought up in ease together with Sita, be able to endure the forest life? How will the young and tender Sita, worthy of happiness, endure heat and cold? How will that large-eyed princess, who lived on dishes prepared by skilful cooks, sustain life on the wild lentils of the forest? How will she, accustomed

to the sweet strains of music, be able to bear the roaring of man-eating lions? How will the two mighty princes, whose arms resemble the rainbow,[1] sleep on the ground, pillowing their heads on their arms. O When will I again behold the lotus face of Rama, framed in beautiful locks, whose eyes are like the water-lily and whose breath is fragrant as the nymphoea? Surely my heart must be as hard as a diamond that it does not break into a thousand pieces, bereft of Rama. O King, in banishing thy children, thou hast been merciless. Worthy of every comfort, they are now wandering aimlessly in the forest. Should Rama return, after fourteen years, will Prince Bharata restore the kingdom and the treasure to him? If those inviting the pious and learned brahmins to the funeral sacrifice, first serve their poor and deserving relations and subsequently the brahmins these will not accept the food of that sacrifice, renouncing it like wine. The learned brahmins regard it as a mark of disrespect to be served even with that in which other brahmins have already participated, which is like a bull shorn of its horns, of lesser worth. O Master of thy People, will not Rama even thus disdain the kingdom enjoyed by his younger and undeserving brother? A lion will not eat the food killed by another, neither will Rama accept that which has already been enjoyed by others. As the libations, butter, kusha grass and pillars employed in the sacrifice, are not used again, so will Rama not accept a kingdom which resembles a sacrifice without soma.[2]

Shri Rama will never suffer this indignity, as a lion will not suffer the twisting of its tail. Do not all fear Rama as he appears on the battlefield? He, himself, is righteous, indicating the path of virtue to others, never will he seize the kingdom by force! Is not the mighty-armed Rama with his golden shafts, able to destroy all living beings and dry up the sea? Yet to-day, that Rama, powerful as a lion, is rendered impotent at the king's command, as the spawn of fishes is devoured by their parents? O King, hadst thou regarded the scriptures and the eternal laws, observed and inculcated by the learned sages, thy virtuous son had not been exiled by thee. O Lord, the first support of a woman is her husband, the second is her son, the third her

[1] Probably in their span.
[2] Soma—a sacred libation offered to the gods.

relatives, but a fourth she has not! Thou hast ceased to regard me as thine, thou hast banished my son Rama, and I may not follow him and leave thee desolate. O Lord, thou hast destroyed me utterly! O King, thou hast brought disaster on thy counsellors, the whole kingdom, the ministers and thyself, and I with my son and all the citizens of Ayodhya are utterly ruined."

Hearing the bitter reproaches of his consort, the king, reflecting on the cause of this calamity, overwhelmed with grief, fell senseless, drowned in the sea of sorrow.

CHAPTER 62

The king is overcome with grief

FILLED with anguish on hearing the harsh words of Queen Kaushalya, the king began to reflect on what could be done. Regaining consciousness, he sighed heavily and began to ponder within himself. He then remembered how, formerly, he had slain a young ascetic inadvertently by a sound-directed arrow, in the forest.

The monarch was now subject to a dual cause of grief, the recollection of his former evil deed and his banishment of Rama. Thus afflicted, with bowed head, the king addressed the queen in faltering tones: "O Kaushalya, ever compassionate to thine enemies, I entreat thee, with joined palms, not to look on me with hostility. O Lady, to the wife, the husband is a deity be he virtuous or worthless, this is the eternal law. I know thee to be wise and acquainted with what is proper and improper, it is not meet that thou shouldst utter these wounding words."

Hearing this plaintive speech, tears welled from the eyes of the queen like falling rain and taking his hands in hers, she addressed the king, saying: "O Lord, do not grieve, be at peace, see, I lay my head at thy feet, do not entreat me, it is as death to me! I have spoken what ought not to be uttered, pardon my transgression! That woman is not nobly bred, who expects

her lord to solicit her with humble words. O Sire, I am acquainted with a woman's duty and I know thee to be a lover of virtue. What I have said was uttered involuntarily through distress on account of my son. Grief destroys patience, grief destroys the understanding, there is nothing more destructive than grief! The blow of an unknown enemy may be endured but the distress arising from grief is not easily borne, even with resignation. This is only the fifth night since the exile of Rama but to me they are as five years. Sorrow has driven away every joy from my breast and because of Rama my pain increases, agitating my heart as the waters of a swiftly flowing river disturb the ocean."

While the queen was yet speaking, the sun declined and the night fell. Consoled by the words of Queen Kaushalya, the king, wearied with grief, sank into slumber.

CHAPTER 63

He recalls a former evil deed which is the cause of his present distress

A FULL hour having passed, the king awoke and was overcome with distress. He began to ponder deeply, but his mind was clouded with grief and though equal to Indra, death threatened to seize him as Rahu[1] seizes the sun.

The sixth night after Rama's exile, the king again remembered his former evil deed and agitated by the recollection of his sin, he addressed the Queen Kaushalya: "O Kalyani, O Auspicious One, whatever man does, be it good or evil, he gathers the fruit thereof. He is deemed ignorant who does not consider the merit or demerit of his actions before performing them. O Queen, he, who, enjoying the red flowers of the palasa tree, cuts down the adjoining mango tree and yet desires to partake of mangoes, will not realize his expectation when the palaśa bears fruit. He,

[1] Rahu—a mythical demon said to cause the eclipse of sun or moon.

who, heedless of the consequences, enters into action, will in the end repent like the man who waters the palasa tree.

" O Lady, I have cut down the mango tree and watered the palasa tree, now, when the fruit is ripe, I too, having banished Rama, repent bitterly. O Kaushalya, in order to be esteemed as an archer, in my youth, I directed my arrows by sound alone, and a grievous deed was committed by me. I am the cause of this present distress. O Queen, as a child swallows poison in ignorance, so have I destroyed my happiness by this deed formerly committed in ignorance. As one beguiled by the beauty of the palasa flower, waters it in expectation of the sweet fruit (of the mango) so did I cultivate the fruit I now reap, by shooting at a sound. O Lady, in those days we were not united in marriage and I was heir-apparent.

"At that time, the rainy season being near, the increase of desire having come, the sun drying up the earth, scorching the world with its rays, entered the southern path. Then the heat subsided and refreshing clouds covered the sky, delighting the peacocks, the frogs and the swallows. The birds drenched with the rain, passed the night in distress, tossed to and fro on the trees by the humid winds. The limpid water in the streams dark and turgid from deposits of the mountain soil, flowed onwards sluggishly.

" In that delightful season, taking my bow and arrows in my chariot, I came to the bank of the river Sarayu, desiring to hunt. Taking my stand at a ford, where buffaloes, elephants and tigers came at night to drink, I heard the sound as of a pitcher being filled with water in the darkness. Seeing nought and deeming it to be the sound of an elephant, I took from my quiver an arrow dipped in the poison of a snake and discharged it whence the sound came. Having discharged the keen and poisoned shaft, I heard the voice of a youth crying out, and he, pierced in the side, fell exclaiming 'Who has shot an ascetic who has no enemy in the whole world ? Desirous of drawing water, I came here in the dead of night. What harm had I done to him who has smitten me ? Why should I, who live on fruits and roots in the forest, and have injured none by word or deed, be slain by weapons ? What gain is there in destroying one wearing bark and deerskin ? To whom have I done an injury ? Such an act is unlawful, as one who does not respect

the couch of his Guru is considered an abandoned person, so he who has wrongfully smitten me, cannot be a virtuous man. I do not grieve for the loss of my own life, but for what will befall my parents, when I die! To what condition will they be brought on my death, that aged pair so long supported by me? My mother, my father and I have been killed by a single arrow! By what foolish man have we all been slain?'

"O Kaushalya, I, ever desirous of acquiring virtue and eschewing what was evil, hearing this sad complaint, became exceedingly distressed and the bow fell from my hands. The lament of the sage caused me the deepest affliction and overwhelmed with grief I advanced to where he lay, wounded by my arrow. There I beheld him lying on the ground, his hair dishevelled, his body besmeared with blood and dust, the water flowing from his loshta[1] which lay at some distance from him. Seeing me standing there dismayed, he fixed me with his gaze as if he would consume me, and said: 'O King, what harm have I, a dweller in the forest, done to thee, that thou hast wounded me while fetching water from the river for my aged parents? Thou hast inflicted a mortal wound by thine arrow and have in this wise slain my mother and father also, who weak, aged and blind and the victims of exceeding thirst, await my return. Afflicted with thirst, they are watching for my return. Alas! what fruit have I earned by the practice of penance and the hearing of the Veda and Puranas[2] since my father does not know that I am lying mortally wounded here? Yet if he knew, what could he do, since he is blind and a cripple? As a tree cut down cannot support another, so my parents blind and crippled cannot assist me. O King, go speedily to my father and inform him of my plight. I fear lest he curse thee and consume thee as a fire burns up wood! O King, the path beheld by thee leads to my parents' hut. Do thou go there and propitiate them, O King, that they may not wax wrath and curse thee. O King, free my side from this shaft; this arrow penetrating my body resembles a river that washes away the long and sandy bank.'

[1] Loshta—a small vessel of coconut or metal used for begging or ceremonial purposes.

[2] Puranas—Legends, or ancient epic poems.

" O Lady, I reflected that as long as the arrow remained fixed he would not die, though suffering great pain, but should I extract it, he would certainly perish. The son of the muni, seeing me afflicted and reading my thoughts addressed me in great agony and said: ' O King, though in anguish and confused, my body quivering with pain and about to die, yet I am able to control my distress and am at peace. Dismiss thy fears, O King, though thy sin is grievous, thou hast not slain a brahmin.[1] O King, I am born of a shudra mother and a vaishya father.'

"As he was speaking, his eyes rolling, his face blanched, struggling and quivering on the earth, I withdrew the arrow and he, looking up in agony, yielded up his breath.

" O Queen, deeply afflicted, I beheld that treasury of truth, lamenting, his body bathed in sweat, in the act of giving up his life."

CHAPTER 64

Overborne by grief the king yields up his life

THE king, grieving over the separation from his son, continued to describe the infamous deed, the slaying of the young ascetic, to the queen and said :—

" O Kaushalya, having unwittingly committed this impious deed, I, deeply distressed, reflected what could now be done and decided to seek out the parents and propitiate them. Taking the pitcher, filled with water, I bore it to the ascetic's hermitage and there beheld his mother and father, aged and feeble, seated together, like two birds bereft of their wings. Motionless, deprived by me of their support, they sat, conversing of their son and awaiting the water. My mind was clouded with grief and I was smitten with fear, but seeing the aged pair, my anguish was increased a thousandfold.

" Hearing the sound of my steps, the father spoke : ' O My

[1] A deadly sin, the five mortal sins being : the murder of a brahmin, the drinking of intoxicating liquor, theft, adultery with the wife of the spiritual preceptor or friendship with those guilty of the above.

Son, why hast thou delayed so long? Give me water speedily, O Child, why hast thou been diverting thyself in the water? Come quickly into the hermitage, thy mother is exceedingly anxious. O My Son, if aught thy mother has done has displeased thee, it behoves thee to forget it. Thou art our only support who are blind and crippled; thou art our very eyes, our lives are dependent on thee, why dost thou not speak to us?'

"Beholding the muni, and as one sorely dismayed, I uttered inarticulate words, then by force of will, controlling my speech, I related to him the whole misfortune. Slowly, I narrated to the sage the distressing fate that had befallen his son and said: 'O Mahatma, I am not thy son, my name is Dasaratha and I am a kshatriya. A sinful act has been committed by me of which I now repent. O Lord, armed with bow and arrow I came to the bank of the Sarayu to hunt the elephant, tiger or lion, that might come there to drink. Hearing the sound of a pitcher being filled with water and supposing it to be an elephant, I discharged an arrow and coming to the bank of the river beheld an ascetic lying on the ground pierced to the heart by my weapon. O Lord, having mistaken thy son, who had gone to seek water, for an elephant, I slew him by an arrow discharged on hearing that sound. On his entreaty I extracted the arrow from his heart causing him pain and he left this life lamenting for his blind parents. Thy son was suddenly and unknowingly slain by me without design; what was to happen, has been accomplished. Thou art a sage, now do what thou considerest proper.'

"Hearing the tale of my evil deed from my own lips, the sage refrained from pronouncing a curse on me. His eyes suffused with tears and his heart distressed, he addressed me who supplicated him with joined palms, saying: 'O King, if thou thyself had'st not confessed this evil deed to me, thy head had instantly split into a thousand pieces by my curse. O King, the killing of one dwelling in the forest by a kshatriya causes him to lose his status, even if he be Indra. If anyone knowingly attacks a sage or spiritual preceptor with a weapon, his head is severed into seven pieces. Thou livest still, since the deed was done by thee without design, else hadst thou and the whole House of Raghu perished.'

" O Kaushalya, the sage said : 'Take me to the place where the body of my son is lying, I wish to acquaint myself with his final state. Alas ! Under the decree of destiny he is lying lifeless on the earth, his body besmeared with blood, stripped of the deerskin formerly worn by him.'

" O Kaushalya, taking the deeply distressed sage and his wife to that place, they, with their fingers touched the lifeless body of their son. Approaching the place, they embraced the dead body of their child, the father crying : 'O Child, thou art to-day not bidding us welcome, nor dost thou speak to me. Why art thou lying on the earth, art thou displeased ? O My Son, if thou art angry with me, regard thy virtuous mother. Why dost thou not embrace me and speak tender words to me ? Now that half the night has gone, who will read the Scriptures and Puranas in gentle accents to me ? O My Son, who will perform our morning ablutions and after offering up his morning devotions, serve and console us ? Helpless and destitute, who will gather roots, berries and fruits for me in the forest, and feed me, like a beloved guest ? O My Son, how shall I nourish and support thy mother, blind, ascetic and devoted to her son ? O My Child, stay, stay, do not yet enter the abode of Yama. To-morrow thy mother and I will accompany thee. Without thee we are distressed, helpless and bereft of support, we will accompany thee to the abode of Yama. Beholding the Lord of Death, we shall say to him, "Forgive our transgressions of the past which have caused us to be separated from our son and let him yet be our support. Grant us this blessing, O Lord of Death, and make us free from fear. Thou art just and the renowned protector of thy realm ? O My Son, thou art innocent and hast been slain by a sinful man, therefore, by the power of truth, enter thou the abode of heroes. Go, my son to that high state attained by those who follow truth and suffer death at the hands of their foes, without retreating. Go to that high region attained by Sagara,[1] Shivya,[2] Dilipa,[3] Janamejaya,[4] Nahusha[5] and

[1] Sagara— the king whose story has been told in a previous chapter.
[2] Shivya or Sivi—King of Usinara whose charity and devotion are extolled in the Mahabharata.
[3] Dilipa— Father of Bhagiratha who brought the Ganges to earth.
[4] Janamejaya— One of the great and virtuous kings of ancient days.
[5] Nahusha— Father of King Yayati. q.v.

Dhundhumara.[1] That state attained by those versed in the Veda and practising austerity, be thine. That state, O My Son, of those who attend the sacred fire, of those highly generous persons who make gifts of land in charity, may that state acquired by those who give thousands of cows in charity and serve their Guru single mindedly, or those courting death by fire in meditation, be thine. None born of thy family has ever descended to a lower state but he who has slain our son shall end in misery ".'

" Thus for a long time wailing in distress, the aged parents began to offer ceremonial water for their dead son. The son of that sage by virtue of his meritorious deeds ascending to heaven in a celestial form, in the company of Indra addressed his parents with consoling words, saying: ' By virtue of my services to you, I have obtained this state, you, too, will soon join me here.' Thereafter, that self-controlled ascetic ascended to heaven in an aerial chariot. O Lady, that great sage with his wife performing the water ritual, said to me standing near with joined palms: ' O King, now put an end to my life also, I shall feel no grief in dying. This was my only son and by slaying him thou hast rendered me childless. As he was slain by thee, I pronounce a curse on thee. Mayest thou suffer the the same grief that thou hast caused to me, through separation from thy son, ending in thy death. O King, having slain the sage unknowingly, the guilt of killing a brahmin will not be thine. As the dispenser of charity receives the merit of those gifts, so wilt thou suffer in the degree of the suffering thou hast caused me, putting an end to thy life.'

" O Queen, having cursed me, they lamented for some time and then gathering wood, kindled a fire, and entering it, departed this life. O Lady, to-day recalling that evil deed, committed thoughtlessly in my youth, by discharging the arrow by sound, the fruit of my action has overtaken me, as illness follows the partaking of unwholesome food. O Noble Lady, the time of the fulfilment of the sage's curse has come."

Having said this, the king weeping and overcome with fear on the approach of death, spoke again: " O Kaushalya, I am

[1] Dhundhumara—Slayer of the demon Dhundhu, a title of the King Kuvalayaswa.

about to yield up my life through grief for my son, I am unable to see thee, do thou draw near and touch me. Those about to enter the abode of death distinguish nought. If Rama could but touch me for an instant, or receive my wealth and the regency, I might yet live. O Auspicious Lady, I have not dealt justly with Rama, but what he has done to me is right. What thoughtful man would abandon even a sinful son? But what son, sent into exile will not think ill of his father? O Kaushalya, I no longer behold thee, my memory is also fading. O Queen, the messengers of death call on me to depart; what affliction is greater than this, that at the hour of death I do not behold the virtuous Rama, the hero of truth? The grief caused by the absence of my son, who never opposed my wishes, dries up my life as heat dries up water. They are not men, they are gods, who will look on that lovely countenance of lotus eyes and charming features after fourteen years! Blessed are those who will behold the face of Rama resembling the full moon, returning to Ayodhya. Fortunate are they who will behold Rama in the capital like the planet Shukra,[1] completing its course in the heavens. O Kaushalya, my heart is breaking, I have lost the sense of touch, taste and sound. When the mind expires, the senses are extinguished as the flame of a lamp subsides when the oil is consumed. O Grief, thou art destroying me and carrying away my life as a river bears away the banks by its force! O Prince, O Mighty Hero, O Sole Remover of my pain, O Darling of Thy Sire, O My Master, My Son, where art thou? O Kaushalya, O Virtuous Sumitra, I depart! O My Cruel Enemy Kaikeyi, destroyer of my family's felicity."

Thus lamenting, the king died in the presence of Rama's mother and the Queen Sumitra.

Overborne by the grief caused by the exile of his son, that generous and mighty king, at midnight, yielded up his life.

[1] Shukra—The planet Venus.

CHAPTER 65

The palace is filled with the sound of distress

THE night having passed, at dawn, according to custom, the bards arrived at the palace of the king, the traditional singers, those versed in rhetoric and in the history of the dynasty, and skilled musicians acquainted with rhythm and melody, began to sing the praises of the king. The sound of their eulogies and their songs filled the whole palace. Others uttering tributes and clapping their hands recited the monarch's wonderful deeds. The birds in the trees near the palace and those confined in cages awoke and sang. Their notes mingled with the salutations of the brahmins, the music of the vinas, the chanting of the holy names of God and the praises of those describing the great deeds of the king. Eunuchs and servants stood near, ready to serve, as was their wont. Those who attended to the ablutions of the king, brought water scented with fragrant perfumes, in pitchers of gold. Charming and well-attired men and women came with oil, unguents, mirrors, combs, towels and other articles and all that was needed by the king was provided according to custom. Till sunrise, all awaited the king, then they addressed each other saying: "How is this, has his majesty not yet risen?" Then the women, other than Kaushalya, who formerly attended on the king, began to waken their lord as was their usage. Having with affection and skill touched the body of the monarch, they found no sign of life in him. Then the women, knowing well the motion of the pulse and understanding the signs of sleep, began to tremble perceiving the king's condition. Fearing that the king no longer breathed, they shook like the narcal[1] grass in the midst of a flowing stream, and slowly became aware that their sovereign had passed away.

The Queens, Kaushalya and Sumitra, overcome with grief on account of the departure of their sons, lay as if dead. Suffering had rendered the chief queen pale and her body feeble. The two queens, their splendour dimmed by sorrow, resembled the stars hidden by clouds.

[1] Narcal grass—a species of reed.

Seeing the two queens lying insensible and the king dead, the women wept aloud in distress.

At the loud wailing of the attendant women, like female elephants bereft of their leader, Kaushalya and Sumitra came to themselves. Touching the body of the king and finding it cold, they fell senseless, crying: " O, My Lord," " O, My Lord." Lying on the earth, covered with dust, Queen Kaushalya resembled a star fallen from the skies.

The king being dead, the ladies of the inner apartments beheld the queen lying on the ground like a female naga.[1] The other consorts of the king with Kaikeyi, overcome with grief, fell unconscious to the earth.

The wailing of the women within, and those who now followed them, filled the whole place. The royal dwelling, bereft of joy and filled with the sound of distress, was thronged with afflicted relatives and friends mourning and weeping. The queens stricken with grief, lamenting piteously, like orphans cleaving to their departed parent, clasped the arms of the mighty monarch.

CHAPTER 66

The inhabitants of Ayodhya mourn for their lord

KAUSHALYA placed the head of the dead king, resembling an extinguished fire or a waterless ocean or the sun without lustre, on her lap and oppressed with grief, thus addressed Kaikeyi: " O Kaikeyi, thy ambition is fulfilled, now rule without further opposition. Having abandoned the king, enjoy the kingdom with thy son, O Thou of Evil Conduct! Rama having departed and the king also, I resemble a traveller on a dangerous and difficult path bereft of his companions. There is no further joy in life for me! Alas! what woman bereft of her lord, her deity, desires to continue to live? Kaikeyi alone is such a one, having abandoned all virtue. The greedy disregard the consequences of their acts, like a hungry man devouring poisonous

[1] Naga—one of the serpent race.

food without considering its effects. Alas! Kaikeyi has destroyed the dynasty of Raghu at the instigation of a hunch-backed woman! How bitterly will King Janaka mourn, on hearing that King Dasaratha, urged by Kaikeyi, has exiled Rama together with his consort. The lotus-eyed Rama, not knowing the king is dead, is unaware that I, to-day, am masterless and a widow! The daughter of King Janaka, the wretched Sita, unworthy of affliction will suffer intensely in the forest. Hearing the fearful roar of lions and tigers, in the dark night, she will cling in terror to Rama. The aged Janaka, whose only child is Sita, will assuredly die of grief, when acquainted with the sufferings inflicted on his daughter! I, to-day, in devotion to my lord, will enter the blazing fire embracing his body."

Hearing these words, the chief minister, versed in the tradition, drew Queen Kaushalya away from the body of the king, and placing it in a vessel filled with oil, to preserve it, performed the requisite ceremonies. The counsellors acquainted with the time-honoured duties, were unwilling to cremate the body of the king in the absence of the prince. As the body was lowered into the oil-filled vessel, the women of the palace wept bitterly, exclaiming: "Alas, the king is dead." Lifting up their arms, shedding tears and wailing pitiably, they cried: "O King, having separated us from the sweet-speaking Rama, why hast thou, too, abandoned us? How shall we live with the evil-minded Kaikeyi, who has exiled Rama and slain her lord? Alas! Shri Rama, the chief support of our life, has gone to the forest, relinquishing his royal portion. How can we live under the reproaches and tyranny of Kaikeyi in the absence of Rama and of thee? Will not she who exiled Rama, the mighty Lakshmana and Sita and abandoned the king, abandon us also?"

Then the chief queens, the consorts of King Dasaratha, overwhelmed with sorrow, shedding tears, felt themselves bereft of all happiness. Like the night without a moon or a lovely and youthful woman bereft of her lord, the city of Ayodhya appeared stricken. Filled with men and women weeping and lamenting, the city was unswept, its ways unadorned! The great sovereign, having through grief at the separation from his son, given up his life, the queens wept lying on the ground, till the sun sank below the horizon and the dark night crept on.

The friends and relatives of the monarch taking counsel together, being unwilling to cremate the body of the king, in the absence of his son, laid it, therefore, in a vessel of oil.

The king being dead, the inhabitants of the city filled the streets and courts, mourning for their lord, causing Ayodhya to resemble the night bereft of stars. Men and women gathered together, inveighing against the mother of Bharata, Queer Kaikeyi. All were distraught and bereft of joy !

CHAPTER 67

The elders recommend that a member of the house of Ikshwaku be appointed king

To the inhabitants of the city, lamenting and weeping, the night was as a high mountain, scaled with difficulty. The sun having risen, the brahmin advisers to the kingdom came together in the royal assembly, even those illustrious ones, Markandeya, Vamadeva, Kasyapa, Gautama, Katyayana and Javali. These renowned sages, together with the ministers, taking their seat in the presence of Vasishtha the excellent and chief priest, declared their mind, saying: " The past night has been like a hundred years to us. Afflicted, on account of his son's departure, the king has given up his life. The king is dead and Shri Rama has entered the forest, together with the mighty Lakshmana. The Princes Bharata and Shatrughna are in the the capital of the kingdom of their maternal grandfather. A member of the House of Ikshwaku must be appointed king lest the country fall into ruin. On a kingdom destitute of a ruler, clouds charged with lightning and thunder pour down rain and hail ! In a rulerless land, the peasants sow no grain ; fathers and sons oppose each other and wives no longer remain subject to their husbands ! In a rulerless land, there is no peace, thieves and brigands exercise their power ; women, unfaithful to their consorts, leave their homes ! Where women lose their virtue, trust is also lost. In a rulerless land, there

are no assemblies, nor do the people visit pleasant parks and gardens or build temples and homes of rest. In such a land, the self-controlled brahmins offer no sacrifice nor do those of pious vows, assist them in the sacred rite. In a rulerless land, the brahmins do not receive their due share of the sacrificial fees; neither do actors nor leaders of song or dance find joy in such a land. The holy festivals promoting the land's prosperity are no longer held, nor do those reciting the holy tradition give satisfaction to their hearers. In a rulerless land, virgins adorned with golden ornaments, do not frequent the flower gardens at close of day, nor do the devotees of pleasure, riding swift chariots in company with charming damsels, repair to the forest. In such a land, the wealthy are not protected, nor does the husbandman, the cowherd and the shepherd sleep at ease with open doors. In a rulerless land, great elephants of sixty years of age do not wander on the royal highways adorned with tinkling bells. The twanging of the archer's bow is no longer heard, nor do the merchants travelling the roads in security bring their goods to sell from distant lands. In a rulerless land, the self-controlled sage, fixing his mind, in contemplation, on his identity with the all-pervading spirit, receives no hospitality when night falls. Wealth is not unassailable, nor are man's needs supplied, the armies have no leaders, nor can they match the enemy in war. In a rulerless country, no man, gorgeously apparelled, riding in an excellent chariot, drawn by swift steeds, can go forth without fear; nor can the learned disputant propound his doctrines in the city or forest. In such a land, garlands and sweetmeats, alms or other gifts, are not offered by worshippers as a sacrifice, nor in the springtime, do the princes, like blossoming trees, adorned with sandalwood and ambergris, walk abroad. A kingdom without a sovereign is like a river without water, a forest without vegetation, or a cow without a keeper. As a chariot is known by its standard, as a fire is indicated by smoke, so the king, a light representing the kingdom, has been extinguished. No man loves his own kind in a rulerless land, but each slays and devours the other. Atheists and materialists, exceeding the limits of their caste, assume dominion over others, there being no king to exercise control over them. As the eyes continuously point out what

is dangerous to the body, promoting its welfare, so the king ever regards the advantage of his people, promoting truth and ethical conduct. The king leads his people in the path of righteousness and guides them in integrity, he is the parent of his subjects and the greatest of benefactors. In the path of duty he excels even Yama, Kuvera, Indra and Varuna. The king, discerning good and evil, protects his kingdom; bereft of him, the country is enveloped in darkness. O Holy Vasishtha, while the king lived, we obeyed thy[1] mandates as the sea keeps within its boundaries. O Great Brahmin, consider our words and the danger threatening this, our kingdom, and appoint someone as king if he be of the house of Ikshwaku."

CHAPTER 68

Messengers are sent to Prince Bharata

SHRI VASISHTHA, having heard the pronouncement of the ministers and brahmins, said: "The king has bequeathed the kingdom to Bharata, who, with his brother abides happily in the house of his maternal uncle, therefore, dispatch swift messengers speedily, to bring back the two princes. This and naught else should be done."

Then all said: "Be it so, O Lord."

Vasishtha then said to Siddartha, Vijaya, Jayanta, Asoka and Nandana:[2] "Come hither and attend to what I command you to do: On swift steeds set out for the city of Rajagraha and, concealing all signs of grief, thus address Prince Bharata: 'The holy priest Shri Vasishtha and his counsellors salute thee and inform thee that an urgent matter awaits thy attention in the capital'."

"Have a care not to disclose to him the fall of the Raghu dynasty nor speak of Rama's exile or the king's death. Take with you silken robes and excellent gems for the King of Kaikeya and for Prince Bharata, and depart without delay."

[1] Shri Vasishtha—being the king's spiritual preceptor.
[2] Ministers of the king.

The messengers received the commands of Shri Vasishtha and taking provision for the journey went to their own houses. Then mounting swift horses, accustomed to prolonged travel, they started for the kingdom of Kaikeya. Having taken leave of the holy Guru, equipped with provisions, they departed in haste. Their course, along the bank of the Malini, lay south between the Uparathala mountain and north of Pralamba. They crossed the sacred Ganges at Hastinapura and proceeded westward arriving in Panchala (the Punjab) by way of Kuru Jangula. On the way, they beheld many lakes filled with limpid water and translucent streams and passing speedily onwards, reached the river Sharadanda, full of pure water and frequented by many species of waterfowl.

On the bank of that river grew the sacred tree Satyapayachan, to which the messengers made obeisance and then entered the city of Kalinga. Passing through the village of Abikala, they crossed the river Ikshumati issuing from the mountain Bodhi-bhavana, a territory formerly belonging to the House of Ikshwaku. There the messengers drank the water of the river from the palms of their hands and encountered certain brahmins versed in the Veda.

Traversing the land of Vahlika, they descried the mountain Sudamana which bore the marks of the Feet of Vishnu, and duly worshipped it. They beheld the rivers Vipasha and Shalmali and many pools, lakes and reservoirs. Proceeding further on their journey, according to the instructions of their master, they saw lions, tigers, elephants and various other beasts.

After a long period, the horses became fatigued, but the messengers pressed on to the town of Giribraja in the kingdom of Kaikeya. For the sake of performing the will of their lord and to preserve the royal dynasty and the honour of the House of Dasaratha, without relaxing their pace, the messengers entered the city at nightfall.

CHAPTER 69

Prince Bharata's inauspicious dream

ON the night the messengers reached the city, Prince Bharata had a most inauspicious dream. Seeing that evil dream, the son of the emperor, when the night ended, was much distressed. His intimate friends, the companions of his own age, seeing him in distress, spoke pleasing words in the assembly and related humorous traditions to distract his mind. Some played on vinas for his entertainment, others danced, acted and narrated stories.

Despite the endeavours of his amiable companions, Prince Bharata remained melancholy. At length, they addressed him, saying: "O Friend, we have tried in vain to entertain thee, why dost thou not smile?"

Bharata replied: "Hear the cause of my sadness. In a dream, I saw my father in faded apparel, his hair dishevelled, falling from a mountain peak into a pit of cow dung. There, I saw that great king, wallowing like a frog and drinking oil from the palms of his hands; afterwards, I beheld him eating rice mixed with sesamum seed, his body besmeared with oil, he being immersed in it. Again, in that dream, I saw the sea dry up and the moon fall on the earth and the world plunged in darkness. The tusks of the royal elephants were broken in pieces and a blazing fire was suddenly extinguished. I saw the earth rent and the leaves of the trees wither and the mountains riven and emit smoke. I beheld the king on an iron seat, clad in black and women attired in black and yellow mocking him. That virtuous king, adorned with sandalwood paste, wearing garlands of red flowers, seated in a chariot drawn by asses went southwards. I saw a female demon of monstrous shape clothed in red deriding the king. This fearful vision has been seen by me. Either myself or Rama or the king or Lakshmana will surely die. When, in a dream, one is seen riding in a chariot drawn by asses, the smoke of his funeral pyre will soon ascend. On this account, I am distraught, nought gives me joy, my throat is choked and my mind confused. I see no reason for fear, yet I am apprehensive. I cannot speak

or breathe, my body has lost its power, I am agitated and cannot control my distress. Never have I seen so threatening a dream! Reflecting on it, I am perturbed, fear has taken possession of my heart and I know not if I shall ever again behold the king."

CHAPTER 70

The message is delivered; Bharata and Shatrughna leave the palace

WHILE Bharata was relating his dream, the messengers from Ayodhya, overcome with weariness, entered the city of Rajagrahapura within the impassable moat.

Having approached the King of Kaikeya and the heir-apparent, Prince Yudhajita, and being received by them with due hospitality, they addressed Prince Bharata saying: "The chief priest, Shri Vasishtha and his counsellors send their greetings! Return speedily to Ayodhya, an urgent matter awaits thy attention there. O Great Prince, taking these precious robes and jewelled ornaments sent to thee, present them to thy maternal uncle."

Shri Bharata, accepting the gifts offered them to his maternal uncle with great affection, then making provision for the messengers and entertaining them duly, he afterwards said to them: "O Messengers, is my father the king well? Is the great Ramachandra well, and my brother Prince Lakshmana? Is the Queen Kaushalya, the upholder of dharma, in good health? She who is virtuous and a patron of brahmins, who is ever to be worshipped, who is wise and the chief queen? Is the second of my father's queens, Sumitra the mother of Lakshmana and Shatrughna, well? And my mother Kaikeyi, self-willed, given to anger, arrogant and accounting herself wise, is it well with her? What message has she sent to me?"

The messengers thus addressed by Prince Bharata, answered with respect: "O Lion among Men, those whose welfare is dear to thee, are well. Prosperity awaits thee, therefore, summon thy chariot."

Prince Bharata said: "I will seek permission of the king to depart and inform him I must go without delay."

Thus, dismissing the messengers, Prince Bharata approached his grandfather and said: "Your Majesty, urged by the messengers, I wish to return to my father in haste, I will come again, when thou art pleased to call me."

King Kaikeya smelling the head of the prince, addressed him in comfortable words, saying: "O Bharata, Kaikeyi is blessed in thee, a virtuous son! Carry my greetings to thy mother and father. Salute also the holy Sage Vasishtha, and the wise and pious brahmins in my name and greet the mighty warriors Rama and Lakshmana."

King Kaikeya, then, bidding Bharata farewell, commending him, gave him great elephants and precious shawls, woollen cloths and deerskins. He gave him also with great veneration, much wealth, two thousand necklaces, coral and gold ornaments and sixteen hundred excellent horses. He sent also wise and trustworthy counsellors to attend him. Then Prince Yudhajita gave Bharata two stately elephants named Iravata and Indrasihra and many mules to transport his gifts. His uncle gave him also certain fierce dogs, bred in the palace with large teeth equalling tigers in strength.

Shri Bharata praised the gifts conferred on him and sought permission to leave without delay. His heart was heavy on account of his fearful dream and the urgency of the messengers.

The prince came forth from the inner apartments of the palace and, surrounded by elephants and horses, stood on the royal highway. Entering the king's apartment, unchallenged, Shri Bharata bade farewell to all, then mounting his chariot with Prince Shatrughna, he started on his journey. Servants, horses, camels, bulls and mules followed the chariot of the prince. Escorted by the private counsellors of the king, together with the army, the patient and highly valiant Bharata together with Shatrughna left the palace fearlessly, as the perfected ones leave the region of Indra.

CHAPTER 71

Prince Bharata sees Ayodhya filled with unhappy people

THAT valiant and resplendent prince, turning eastward, came to the river Suddama, and passing over it, reached the broad Hladini and the Satali flowing westward. Having crossed over the river at Iladhana, he reached Parvata and the stream in which all objects thrown are petrified, then proceeding further he forded the Shalyakartana river. Then the righteous and truth loving prince ascended the mountains and crossed the river Shilavaha near the forest Chitraratha, arriving at the confluence of the Ganges and Saraswati, and traversing the land of Viramatsya, entered the Bharunda forest. At length, reaching the swift and joy-inspiring Kulinga river, which descends from the mountains, he crossed the Yamuna and allowed his army to rest. There, the weary horses were refreshed and his followers bathed and drank, taking water with them for future use on the way. Thereafter, Prince Bharata entered the uninhabited forest on a great Bhadra elephant, speedily traversing it. Finding they were unable to cross the Gunga at Unchudhana, they went to the place called Pragavata and crossing there passed over another river named Kutikoshtaka; then with his army, he reached the village of Dharmavardhana. Resting for a while at Varutha, the son of Dasaratha went towards the east to the wood called Ujjihana which was filled with kedumbra[1] trees. Arriving at the groves of sala[2] and bhanduka[3] trees, Bharata, leaving his army to follow slowly, went forward with haste, halting at the village of Sarvatirtha. Then crossing the river Uttamika, he passed over several other streams with the help of mountain ponies. At Hastiprastaka, he crossed the river Kutika and at Lohitya, the Sukatavati. Arriving at the forest of Sahavana, having crossed the Sthanumati near Eksala, he traversed the Gaumati at Vinata. His horses being greatly fatigued by the journey, the prince halted the night at Salawan and at dawn beheld Ayodhya.

[1] Kedumbra—a kind of acacia.
[2] Sala tree—sal tree, Shorea robusta.
[3] Bhanduka—Calosanthes indica.

Having spent seven nights on the way, seeing Ayodhya from a distance, the prince said to his charioteer: "O Charioteer, this would appear to be the renowned and taintless city of Ayodhya abounding in green lawns, but at a distance it resembles a heap of yellow dust; formerly the sound of the recitation of the Veda was heard, intoned by the brahmins, and the city was frequented by royal sages. To-day, I do not hear the cheerful cries of men and women in pursuit of pleasure! The woods at eventide were formerly filled with people, running here and there in sport, but to-day they are deserted and silent. O Charioteer, this is not like Ayodhya to me, but seems to be a wilderness. None of the nobly born are seen coming and going in chariots or riding on elephants and horses. The flower gardens were erstwhile filled with cheerful people and the orchards with those who made merry there! These gardens, once abounding in flowers and trees, with pleasant groves and arbours, to-day seem to mourn. I no longer hear the cry of deer or the birds singing with joy. O Friend, why do the breezes, redolent with the scent of sandalwood and ambergris, not blow as formerly, over the city? In the past, the sound of drums and the music of the Vina was heard by us, now all is silent! I see portentous signs and evil omens, my mind is heavy on account of these forebodings. O Charioteer, without apparent cause my heart beats fast and painfully, my mind is clouded, and apprehension freezes my senses."

Entering the capital by the northern gate, his horses being overcome with weariness, the guards, enquiring as to his welfare, sought to accompany him on his way. But Bharata, sick at heart, declined their company, though with due deference.

He said: "O Charioteer, I behold the houses with their doors set open, bereft of splendour and emitting no fragrance of incense or sacrificial offering! Filled with unhappy people and those who are fasting, the houses are destitute of all splendour. No garlands hang from any dwelling and the courtyards lie neglected and unswept. The temples, without attendant priests, have lost their former splendour, none worship the gods and the sacrificial pavilions are deserted. The shops where formerly flowers were sold and other merchandise, are neglected, and the merchants appear dispirited and anxious over the cessation of their

trade. Birds in the sacred groves seem joyless and men and women in soiled attire, weeping and lamenting, wasted with grief, roam about the city."

Speaking thus to the charioteer and seeing the city's distress, Prince Bharata drove towards the palace. Beholding the capital once gay as Indra's city, with the roads and courts deserted and the houses covered with dust, he was overcome with anguish. Struck by these painful portents formerly unknown to him, Bharata, with bowed head, his heart filled with dread, entered his father's palace.

CHAPTER 72

Queen Kaikeyi begins to relate what has occurred

NOT seeing his father in the palace, Bharata, desirous of beholding his mother, went to her apartment. Kaikeyi, seeing her son after a long absence, with a joyous heart, rose from her golden couch. Observing the apartment of his mother, divested of splendour, Bharata reverently touched her feet. She, having kissed the head of her son, embracing him again, seated him on her lap, and said: " O Child! How many days have passed since thou didst leave thy grandfather's abode? Having journeyed in haste, I trust thou art not fatigued? O Child, are thy grandfather and uncle well? Tell me, O Dear One, hast thou been in health since thou hast visited that other country?"

Shri Bharata thus questioned, by his mother, related all that had happened. He said: " O Mother, seven days and seven nights have passed, since I left my grandfather's home. Both he and my uncle are well. The parting gifts of wealth and gems which the King of Kaikeya gave me, I have left on the way, to follow me, the beasts of burden being weary! The messengers who conveyed the orders of the king, bade me return with all speed. Now, O Mother, answer what I would feign ask? Why is this, thy golden couch, vacated by the king?

"Why do the king's subjects appear wretched? The king was wont to dwell principally in thy palace, where is he to-day? I have come hither to enter his august presence! Where is my father now, I have come to offer salutations to his feet? Is he in the apartment of my chief mother, Queen Kaushalya?"

Kaikeyi, knowing all that had taken place but filled with ambition, answered Prince Bharata, as yet ignorant of the matter. Imparting the unpleasant news in honeyed accents, she said: "That fate, which inevitably overtakes all beings, has befallen that great soul, that renowned and mighty monarch the support of his people, thy sire!"

The guileless Prince Bharata, born of a great family, hearing these words, overwhelmed by grief, instantly fell to the ground and falling striking his hands on the earth, cried: "Alas! I am undone!" That resplendent prince, deeply moved on learning of the death of his father, began to lament, crying: "On this couch, my father appeared like the moon in autumn, to-day on account of his absence, this pleasant bed resembles the sky bereft of stars or the ocean without water!"

Heaving deep sighs, weeping bitterly and covering his face with a cloth, the prince continued to mourn.

Queen Kaikeyi, seeing Bharata lying on the ground, overwhelmed with sorrow, like the branch of a shala tree, severed by the blows of an axe, raised him up and said to her godlike son who resembled the moon, the sun or the elephant in splendour: "O Son of a King! O Most Illustrious One! Rise! Rise! Pious men like thee, do not thus yield to grief! O Wise One! As the radiance of the sun is fixed in that orb, so must thou who art devoted to charity, sacrifice and good conduct and who follow the injunctions of the Vedas, be calm!"

Prince Bharata, rolling on the earth, wept for a long time and then answered his mother sorrowfully, saying: "O Mother, thinking the king was undertaking a great sacrifice, having bestowed the throne on Shri Rama, I started for home with great joy, but now I see matters are otherwise and my mind is torn with anguish, since I no longer behold my ever magnanimous parent! O Mother, from what malady did the king suffer, that he was carried away in my absence? How fortunate are my brothers, Shri Rama and Lakshmana, who

have performed the monarch's obsequies ! If the great sovereign had been aware of my return, would he not have bent his head and embraced me ? Alas ! Where is that royal hand, the touch of which filled me with delight and which cleansed my body from the dust ? O Mother, where is my sagacious brother Rama, whose servant I am and who resembles my father ? Tell me quickly where he may be found ? Since my virtuous and enlightened brother has now become as a father to me, I desire to take refuge at his feet, he alone is my sole support ! O Mother, what commands concerning me did the righteous and learned king, the ever-truthful monarch of firm vows, give ? I desire to hear the last words of the great sovereign ? "

Thus questioned, Queen Kaikeyi openly answered, saying : " The king, at the time of death, did not speak thy name but cried 'O Rama, O Sita, O Lakshmana' and thus gave up his life ! Thy father, bound by the ties of fate and duty, like a mighty elephant, caught in ambush, uttered these words at the end : 'Those who see Rama, Sita and Lakshmana, returning from the forest, will attain their desire'."

As Kaikeyi revealed this unpleasant intelligence, the prince grew yet more distracted and enquired of his mother : " O Mother, where is the virtuous Rama, where is he now with Sita and his brother Lakshmana ? "

Thus questioned, the queen began to relate what had occurred, supposing the news of the unpleasing event would be welcome to her son.

She said : " O Child, that prince, clothed in robes of bark, has entered the great Dandaka forest with Sita and Lakshmana."

Hearing from his mother that Rama had entered the forest, Prince Bharata was alarmed, filled with misgivings and concerned for the honour of his House. He said : " O Mother, how is this ? Has Shri Rama, without reason, slain any, either rich or poor ? Or has he looked on the wife of another with desire ? For what reason has Rama, versed in the scriptures, been exiled to the forest ? "

Then the mother of Bharata, imbued with feminine qualities, capricious and calculating, began to relate the whole matter. Hearing her son's words, Kaikeyi, gratified, vainly imagining herself wise, said : " My Son, neither has Rama robbed a

brahmin of his wealth, nor has he slain any, rich or poor, without reason, neither has Rama looked on another's wife with desire ! My Son, having heard that he was to be proclaimed regent, I requested thy father to banish Rama and bestow the kingdom on thee ! Thy sire, in order to honour the promise made to me, fulfilled my request. He sent Rama, together with Sita and Lakshmana to the forest. Then that mighty monarch, unable to endure the separation from his son, died. O Righteous Prince, now do thou rule the kingdom ! For thy sake, I have contrived all this ! My Son, do not grieve, do not afflict thyself, the kingdom and the capital, being now without a ruler, depend on thee for support. Therefore, seeking advice from Shri Vasishtha and the learned brahmins, perform the funeral rites of thy great sire and, without hesitation, accept the throne ! "

CHAPTER 73

Prince Bharata reproaches his mother

HEARING of the death of his father and the exile of his brothers, Prince Bharata, deeply afflicted, answered Queen Kaikeyi: " What will the throne avail me, since I am stricken by the death of my father and bereft of my brother, who was as a parent to me ? Thou hast destroyed the king, and banished Rama, causing him to become an ascetic ! Thou hast thus rubbed salt into the wounds which thou hast inflicted ! Thou hast entered this royal House for its extinction, like the night of death ! My father, unaware that thou wert an all-consuming fire, supported thee. O Sinful One, thou hast deprived the king of life ! O Thou Destroyer of the Family, overpowered with avarice, thou hast shattered the peace of the hearth. Through union with thee, my father, a lover of truth, has suffered untold misery and grief ! Wherefore hast thou slain my virtuous sire ? Wherefore hast thou exiled Rama ? Hard indeed were it to live with such a mother ! How will Kaushalya and Sumitra now endure life ? My elder brother, Shri Ramachandra, ever devoted to his duty and to the service of his Guru, treated thee

as his own mother. So also my elder mother, Queen Kaushalya, knowing what would befall, yet acted towards thee as a true sister, in a proper spirit. Thou hast sent her son to the forest in ascetic's garb and still thou dost not grieve? What hast thou gained by sending that renowned hero, Rama, to the forest, Rama, who was unacquainted with suffering? Wert thou ignorant of my great love for Raghava, that thou, possessed by avarice, committed this great sin, O Mother? By what power can I rule, deprived of Lakshmana and that Lion among men, Shri Rama? King Dasaratha ever depended on that mighty and valorous Rama, as the forest depends on Mount Meru! How can I sustain the burden of the kingdom, without the support of Rama? How should a calf sustain the load that taxes the strength of a full-grown bull? Even if it were possible for me to rule through wisdom and sound policy, yet would I not allow thy evil intention in seeking the kingdom for thy son, to prevail! I should have abandoned thee, O Mother, did I not know that Rama regards thee as his mother also! O Thou Evil-minded One, thou hast brought disgrace on the dynasty of my ancestors! How didst thou conceive such a purpose, bringing shame into our lives? It is the immemorial custom of our House, that the eldest brother shall occupy the throne and the younger brothers obey him. Thou art not acquainted with the duty of a king nor dost thou know the rules of government. In the House of Ikshwaku, the succession of the eldest son is enjoined. To-day, thou hast cast into the dust the glory and integrity of the House of Ikshwaku, that was enriched by the noble conduct of its kings! Thou, too, wert born of a renowned and royal House, how camest thou to entertain this evil intention? O Mother, let it be known to thee that I will never fulfil thy evil desires, come what may, since thou hast introduced that which is destructive of life into this royal House! I shall now bring my sinless brother, Rama, back to the capital and thwart thee! Not only will I cause Rama to return from the forest, but I will serve him with my whole heart!"

Thus reproaching Kaikeyi, himself afflicted, with harsh words, Bharata spoke once more, roaring like a lion in the caves of the Mandara mountain.

CHAPTER 74

He laments the death of his father and the exile of Shri Rama

SHRI BHARATA denounced his mother in great anger, saying :—

" O Cruel-hearted One, O Wicked Being, thou art without virtue, enter the forest, I am about to die ! Weep for me ; since thou hast deserted thy consort, do not mourn for him. Tell me, what harm had the king or the most virtuous Rama done to thee, that thou hast slain the one and exiled the other ? O Kaikeyi, the sin by which thou hast destroyed the dynasty is equal to the murder of a brahmin ! Do thou enter hell ! Thou hast no right to inhabit the region to which the king has gone ! Thy deed and guilt are infamous. In denouncing Rama, who is beloved of all the world, thou hast secured me a kingdom, but brought me ignominy. Thou art the cause of my father's death and the exile of Rama, and also of my dishonour. Thy heart is adamant, thou art not my mother but an enemy in the form of a mother ! O Slayer of thy husband, thou dost not merit that one should address thee ! O Defamer of the fair name of this dynasty, thou art the cause of distress to my mothers, Queen Kaushalya and Sumitra ! Thou hast forfeited the title of daughter to the great King Ashwapati ; thou art surely a demon born in that family to destroy my father's line ! Thou hast banished Rama to the forest, he, who ever delighted in virtue and thou hast deprived my illustrious father of his life ! It is I who must bear the weight of thine iniquity, who am fatherless, bereft of my two brothers and an object of universal loathing ! O Thou Sinner, O Traveller on the path of self-destruction, say what state shalt thou attain, who hast deprived the virtuous Kaushalya of her husband and her son ? O Evil One, didst thou not know that Shri Rama was the chief asylum of his relatives, the son of Kaushalya and a father to me ? All relatives are dear, but to a mother, the son is dearest, since he is born of the body and heart of the father. Hast thou forgotten this truth ? "

In ancient times, the cow Kamadhenu, worshipped by the

gods, beholding two of her sons, weary with ploughing, swooned away. At that time, the King of the Celestials, Indra, was wandering on the earth and the fragrant tears of Kamadhenu fell upon him. Experiencing the sweet odour issuing from the body of the sacred cow, Indra realised her superior worth and startled, looked upward and beheld, in the sky, the afflicted Kamadhenu, weeping piteously. The Bearer of the Mace,[1] distressed on seeing the renowned Kamadhenu shedding tears, addressed her with humility and said: " O Benefactor of the World, why dost thou weep? Is it the premonition of some future calamity which causes thee to lament thus?"

The wise Kamadhenu, patiently answered: " O Devaraj, thou hast no cause for fear, I am afflicted on account of the suffering of two of my sons. See, how wretched they are, how wasted and oppressed by the sun's heat! O Devaraj! The ploughman has struck them cruelly! Born of my body, I am filled with grief to see them yoked to the heavy plough! Verily nothing is dearer to a mother than her son."

Indra, perceiving that the cow mourned over the wretched state of two of her innumerable sons, recognised that to a mother nothing is dearer than a son!

" O Mother, Kamadhenu extends her blessings equally to all and has the power to fulfil the desires of others. If she, who is constantly producing thousands of offspring, filled with maternal love, mourns thus for two sons, how then, O Kaikeyi, will Kaushalya bear the exile of her only son? Thou hast brought about the separation of Rama from his mother Kaushalya and for this thou shalt not know happiness in this or in the other world! I shall perform the last rites for my sire and then, with my heart and soul serve my brother and carefully promote his honour. Having brought back Shri Rama to the capital, I, myself, shall inhabit the forest. O Thou, of evil intent, how shall I endure thine iniquity, when looked on by the people of the capital with sorrow-stricken gaze? Now it befits thee to enter the fire or hang thyself in the Dandaka forest, death alone is thy desert! Only when Rama returns and that Prince of Truth is by my side, shall I find peace and my purpose be accomplished!"

[1] Indra was sometimes called the " Bearer of the Mace ".

Bharata, lamenting and breathing like a serpent, fell to the earth like an elephant tormented by the goad. His eyes red with anger, his dress loosened, his jewels cast aside, he fell like the banner of Indra, uprooted at the close of a ceremony.

CHAPTER 75

He seeks to console Queen Kaushalya

THE valiant Bharata, regaining consciousness, his eyes suffused with tears, perceived his mother filled with distress. Seated in the midst of his counsellors, he poured forth reproaches on his mother saying: "It was never my desire to rule, nor did I consult my mother in this matter; I was not acquainted with the king's intention to confer the crown on Rama, being far from the capital with Shatrughna. I knew nought of the exile of Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Sita, nor how it came to pass. My heart is filled with anguish."

Kaushalya, hearing the sound of Bharata's weeping, said to Sumitra: "Bharata, the son of the cruel Kaikeyi, has come, I wish to see the prudent Bharata."

The queen, pale and weak on account of her separation from Rama, advanced trembling to where Bharata was, while the prince with his brother Shatrughna started likewise for the apartment of the queen. The two brothers beheld the wretched queen proceeding with tottering footsteps and were filled with distress. Bowing down to Kaushalya, they wept bitterly, then the chief queen embraced Bharata sobbing with grief and said: "It was thy desire to rule and thy cruel mother has accomplished this matter without hindrance, but for what reason has this pitiless queen sent my son to the forest in ascetic's garb? Let Queen Kaikeyi banish me also to that region where my illustrious and golden-complexioned Rama abides! If not, I will go together with Sumitra to where Rama dwells, preceded by the sacrificial fire. O Bharata, do thou take me to where my son, that lion among men, in great affliction is practising asceticism.

Queen Kaikeyi has made thee sovereign of this country, replete with wealth, grain, horses, elephants and chariots."

Hearing the bitter words of Queen Kaushalya, Bharata was pained as a man who suffers when his wound is probed by a lancet. Agitated and confused, he fell at the feet of the queen lamenting. Then growing composed, with joined palms, he addressed the sorrowing queen: " O Mother, thou knowest how great is my love for Rama and also that I am innocent in this matter. Why dost thou reproach me? May he, who is the cause of the exile of Rama, forget the teachings of the Vedas and the holy tradition. May he, who has given his consent to the exile of Rama, become a slave of the lowest caste or incur the sin of killing a cow. May such a man be subject to the same punishment as one who withholds the wages of his labourers. May he who has consented to the banishment of the holy prince, bear the same guilt as one rebelling against a king, who protects his subjects as his own offspring! May the guilt of a king taking the sixth part of the revenue of his people and yet failing to protect them, be his, who exiled Rama.

" May the fruits of the sin incurred by one who, well-equipped with elephants, horses and chariots and all weapons, does not fight according to the law of righteousness, be his! May he, who agreed to the exile of Rama, forget the teachings of Vedanta which ensure happiness, and all the secrets obtained from his spiritual preceptor by serving him! May such a one not live to see the coronation of Prince Rama whose countenance equals the sun and moon in splendour. May that wretch incur the sin of one, who, partaking of milk and rice, does not make an offering to his ancestors and guests or to the gods. May he be guilty of not honouring his spiritual preceptor by offering salutations to him in a fitting manner.

" May that wretch, who gave consent to the exile of Rama, bear the same guilt as one who strikes a cow, reviles his Guru or betrays his friends! May he incur the guilt of one who forswears his trust. May he, who participated in the exile of Rama, reap the sin of one who does not do good to others.

" May the wretch, who ordered the exile of Rama, bear the guilt of one, who, partaking of sweetmeats, fails to share them with his servants, women, children or those surrounding him,

or one who, living on excellent food, gives to his inferiors that which is raw and ill-cooked. May he, by whom Rama was sent into exile, die without marrying a woman of his own caste or producing offspring or performing the fire ritual! May he not behold the offspring born of his spouse! May his years be brief! May he be slain in battle, retreating from a superior foe in fear, or may he be as one who slays a fleeing enemy. May he, like one dressed in rags, demented, carrying a skull in his hand, wander about begging from door to door! May he who has conspired to send Rama to the forest be given over to wine, women and gambling and become an object of contempt on account of his concupiscence and anger. May he ever indulge in the practice of unrighteousness and forget his duty and distribute immense wealth in charity to the undeserving! May the accumulated wealth and extensive possessions of the one who has furthered the exile of Rama, be stolen away by thieves. May the sin of him who sleeps at sunrise or sunset be his! May the sin of him who is guilty of arson or looks with desire on the wife of his spiritual preceptor or who betrays his friend, be his, who has advocated the exile of Shri Rama! May he, who acquiesced in the exile of Rama be deprived of the worship of his ancestors and parents as also of the funeral rites! May such a one, even now, be driven from the society of good people and lose the renown and merit of companionship with the virtuous! May his mind never be devoted to such deeds as are undertaken by the righteous! May that man who sought to exile Rama, fail to obey his mother and ever be employed n evil deeds! May he maintain a large family in extreme poverty! May he, ever restless, be consumed with fever! May he be guilty of that sin incurred by one, who fails to satisfy a miserable suppliant who looks to him for succour! May he be deceitful, slanderous, base, depraved and ever walk in fear of authority! May he incur the guilt of one who disregards his chaste and devoted wife, who approaches him in the season of her flowering! May he be dull-witted and abandoning his lawful spouse, may he live in sin with other women! May the guilt of a brahmin who abandons his children, who are dying of hunger be his! May he be like one who defiles a reservoir or administers poison to another! May that man

lose the power of his limbs, as he who seeks to impede the hospitality to be shown to a brahmin, by speaking ill of him! May his be the sin of one who drinks the milk of the cow that possesses unweaned calves! May he incur the sin of him, who, having water in his dwelling, turns the thirsty man from his door! May he bear the guilt of him, who arbitrating between two learned disputants, grants victory to the one he favours!"

With these words, Prince Bharata, seeking to console Queen Kaushalya for the separation from her son, fell to the ground, overcome with distress.

The queen then addressed him, who, distraught and afflicted, seeking to establish his innocence, had fallen to the earth, and said: "My Son, my pain is increased by the words thou hast uttered but fortunate it is that the hearts of Lakshmana and thyself are fixed in love of thy brother. Assuredly thou wilt enter the region attained by the blest."

Then the queen, taking the mighty-armed prince in her lap, wept aloud.

The prince whose heart was rent with grief also wept in an excess of sorrow. Caressed by the queen, lamenting wildly, lying on the earth and sighing heavily, he passed the night in this wise.

CHAPTER 76

The prince commences the performance of the funeral rites

SHRI VASISHTHA, renowned among the sages, beholding Shri Bharata overcome by grief, addressed him in sage words, saying: "O Illustrious Prince, may happiness be thine, restrain thy grief! The time has now come to perform the obsequies of the great king!"

Bharata, lying on the earth, heard the commands of the holy sage, and rising, began to perform the funeral rites.

The attendants now removed the body of the monarch from the vessel of oil and laid it on the earth. Though the body

had assumed a yellow hue through being immersed in oil for many days, yet it appeared as if the king slept.

They then laid the king on a couch set with gems and Bharata, overwhelmed with grief, began to lament. He said: "O Great King, I know not why, in mine absence, thou didst send Rama to the forest. Whither art thou gone, leaving me bereft of Rama, that Lion among men and the Doer of famous deeds? O Great Sovereign, who with a constant mind is able to preserve his mighty kingdom? Thou art dead and Shri Rama is banished. O Mighty Ruler, this earth is widowed and divested of all beauty without thee! Without thee, the capital resembles a moonless night."

Shri Vasishtha again addressed Shri Bharata, perceiving him still to be a prey to grief and said: "O Mighty-armed Prince this is no time for giving way to sorrow or procrastination, now perform the last rites for the king."

Thus addressed, Shri Bharata with the aid of the brahmins and the spiritual preceptor of the monarch, inaugurated the funeral ceremonies.

In the sacrificial hall, the priests performed the fire ritual. The servitors placed the body of the king on a litter and conveyed it thence, weeping and lamenting. Scattering golden coins, and silver flowers and laying cloths before the bier, they proceeded on their way, while before the palace, sandalwood, ambergris and incense were kindled.

On the banks of the river Sarayu, a funeral pyre of devadaru,[1] sandal and other fragrant woods, was raised. Aromatic herbs were thrown on the pyre and the body of the king laid upon it. The sacrificing priests poured oblations on the funeral pile, to the end that the monarch should attain the beatific state, and intoned the traditional mantrams, whilst the brahmins, acquainted with the Sama Veda,[2] sang the Sama hymns.

The queens, carried in palanquins, attended by the royal and aged guards, approached the funeral pyre, weeping. Then they, overcome with grief, together with the priests circumambulated the blazing body of the king. The piteous wailing of the stricken Queens and the cries of distress of innumerable

[1] Devadaru—a species of pine.
[2] Sama Veda—the third Veda.

women following them, resembled the call of the krauncha birds in the mating season. Then the queens, abandoning their vehicles, approached the bank of the river Sarayu and, together with Prince Bharata, the counsellors and ministers, offered libations of water; thereafter, weeping bitterly, they returned to the capital, where for the period of ten days they slept on the bare earth.

CHAPTER 77

The ceremonies are continued

ON the eleventh day, Prince Bharata purified himself and on the twelfth day he performed the Sapindi[1] ceremony, and distributed jewels, gold, silver, gorgeous apparel and other articles among the brahmins.

He also gave in charity countless white goats and cows, male and female servants, chariots and horses. On the thirteenth day, the mighty-armed Bharata, overcome with grief, went to collect the ashes of the king and, standing near the funeral pyre, spoke in a voice choked with emotion. He said: "O Lord, my brother, Ramachandra, to whom thou hadst entrusted me, has entered the forest and thou, also, hast abandoned me, helpless and wretched as I am. O Father, where hast thou gone, abandoning Mother Kaushalya, whose son is now exiled?"

Seeing the white ashes of the king's bones and the body wholly consumed, Bharata burst into fresh lamentation, and weeping, fell on the earth. The people tried to raise the prince who was lying on the ground like the banner of Indra, its support broken.[2] The counsellors raised up Prince Bharata as the sages formerly lifted up King Yayati, who had fallen from heaven on the termination of the fruit of his merit. Perceiving Bharata, overcome with grief, Shatrughna, remembering his sire, also fell senseless to the ground.

[1] Sapindi ceremony—the establishing of connection with kindred through obsequial offerings.

[2] An allusion to the Shakra-Dhwana ceremony, in which a banner is erected on a pillar or tree, in honour of Indra.

Being somewhat restored, they called to mind the excellent qualities of their illustrious father and Shatrughna cried: " The boons exacted by Manthara are the ocean inhabited by the crocodile Kaikeyi, in which we are submerged. O Father, where art thou gone, abandoning thy tender and beloved son Bharata? Why hast thou abjured us, thou who wast wont to give us delicious food, fitting gifts, robes and ornaments? Who will now confer these favours on us? Why is the earth not riven, thus deprived of an illustrious and pious sovereign? Alas! My father has departed to heaven and Shri Rama has gone to the forest! How can I continue to live? Bereft of my father and brother, I shall enter the fire. I shall not return to the capital, I shall go to Tapovana."

The palace attendants hearing the prince grieving so bitterly, were afflicted and fell to the ground, tormented like bulls whose horns are broken.

Then the excellent and wise Vasishtha, their father's chief priest raising Bharata up, addressed him, saying: " O Prince, thirteen days have passed since the cremation of thy illustrious father's body. Do not delay longer, but collect the bones that remain. Every man suffers the three pairs of opposites; hunger and thirst, pleasure and pain, life and death. Do not permit thyself to grieve for that which cannot be avoided."

Then the wise Sumantra raised up Shatrughna and consoling him explained the nature of birth and death that visits all beings. Standing erect, those two lions among men, their eyes red with much weeping, resembled the standards of Indra, bereft of glory by the effects of sun and rain. Then the counsellors approached the two princes and requested them to undertake the remaining ceremonies.

CHAPTER 78

The hunchback, Manthara, incurs Prince Shatrughna's displeasure

As Bharata, still grieving, was considering how he should approach Shri Rama in the forest, Prince Shatrughna spoke: " O Brother, how is it that Shri Rama, the support of all beings in distress and who is powerful, has been banished to the forest with his consort? Even if Shri Rama were bewildered, why did the mighty and courageous Lakshmana not defend him and restrain his father? The king, falling under the sway of desire, forsook the precepts of justice, Prince Lakshmana who was acquainted with what was right, should have restrained the king from this sinful act."

While Prince Shatrughna was conversing thus with Bharata, the hunchback Manthara, attired in costly garments, adorned with precious gems, appeared at the east door. Painted thickly with sandalwood paste, wearing a robe and ornaments befitting a queen, bestowed on her by Kaikeyi, her waist encircled by a jewelled girdle, her whole body covered with precious stones, she resembled a captive monkey. The guards seeing that wicked and deformed slave, seized her and said to Prince Shatrughna: " This is the sinful wretch who has caused the exile of Shri Rama and the death of the king; deal with her according to thy pleasure."

On hearing the words of the guards, the prince smarting with indignation, reflected on his duty and said to those in the palace: " Let this woman, the cause of the grief of my brothers and the death of my father, suffer the consequence of her acts."

Shatrughna then seized Manthara from amidst her companions with such violence that her shrieks filled the palace! The women, perceiving Shatrughna so enraged, dealing thus with the hunchback, ran away in all directions. They reflected among themselves, saying: " The enraged prince will surely put an end to us all, let us therefore take refuge with the compassionate, liberal and illustrious Queen Kaushalya, she alone will protect us."

Prince Shatrughna, the conqueror of his foes, his eyes red with anger threw Manthara on the ground and forcibly dragged her hither and thither, while all her ornaments were scattered, causing the palace to look like the autumn sky, studded with stars! Dragging Manthara in anger before Queen Kaikeyi, who sought to deliver her, the prince reproached his mother with bitter words. Pained by the harsh speech of Prince Shatrughna, the terrified Kaikeyi fled to Prince Bharata for protection.

Perceiving Shatrughna overcome by anger, Bharata addressed him saying: " O Brother, women are not to be slain by any living being, therefore pardon her and set her free! If women were subject to the law of retribution, and were it not that Rama would forsake me as a matricide, I would have slain this sinful woman long since! If Shri Rama became acquainted with our treatment of this deformed woman, he would never converse more with us."

Thus instructed by Prince Bharata, Shatrughna restrained his wrath and released Manthara, who fell at the feet of Queen Kaikeyi, panting and lamenting. Perceiving Manthara full of fear under Shatrughna's displeasure and trembling like an imprisoned krauncha bird, Kaikeyi gradually calmed her.

CHAPTER 79

Prince Bharata decides to go to the forest and bring back his brother

EARLY on the fourteenth day, the king's ministers being assembled, thus addressed Prince Bharata: " Our Venerable Sovereign, King Dasaratha, having sent his eldest son, Shri Rama and the mighty Prince Lakshmana, into exile, has, himself, joined the circle of the gods. Thou art to-day our Lord, O Mighty Prince. The kingdom is now rulerless and the king bequeathed it to thee, it is not improper for thee, therefore, to ascend the throne, nor will any censure thee on this account.

O Prince of the House of Raghu, all the articles for thy coronation are made ready; thy relatives, counsellors and ministers and the citizens look to thee. O Great Prince, accept the kingdom of thy paternal ancestors and cause thyself to be installed and protect us all."

The Speaker of Truth, the illustrious Bharata, hearing these excellent words, reverently circumambulating the articles designed for the coronation ceremony, replied to those who thus addressed him: "Hear, O My People, it is known to you that according to the tradition of our Royal House the throne is inherited by the eldest son of the deceased sovereign; it is, therefore, improper for you to make this request to me. Shri Rama is my elder brother and, therefore, should be king. I shall enter the forest and reside there during fourteen years in his stead. Now order my whole army to hold itself in readiness, I will go to the forest and bring my brother back, taking with me all the articles necessary for his installation. Rama will there be proclaimed king! I will restore him like the holy fire which is brought to the place of sacrifice. I will never suffer the ambitions of Queen Kaikeyi to be fulfilled. I will enter the forest, hard to penetrate, and shall make Rama king. Let the rough and uneven roads at once be repaired by skilled artisans; let them be followed by mechanics and labourers."

The people were gratified to hear the auspicious words of the prince and replied: "O Prince, may the Goddess of Prosperity[1] ever abide with thee! Desirous of making Rama our king, thy words are timely."

Then all present experienced great joy and shed tears of delight. The happy courtiers, ministers and servants spoke cheerfully, saying: "O Chief of Men, at thy command we are summoning the workmen to prepare the way."

[1] Shri Lakshmi, consort of Shri Vishnu.

CHAPTER 80

A royal highway is constructed for the prince

Now, commanded by Prince Bharata, water diviners, expert and industrious mechanics, builders of bridges, wheelwrights, men able to perform all kinds of work, woodcutters, artisans skilled in the sinking of wells, labourers, hewers of wood, cooks and those acquainted with the way, set forth. The multitude of people advancing, appeared astonishing, like the sea under the full moon.

Those proficient in various ways, equipped with axes and other implements, advanced in groups, cutting through trees, shrubs, bushes and rocks, levelling them and hewing out a path; planting trees where these were needed, they cut back the branches of others that obstructed the way. Strong men set fire to tree trunks and cleared the road, levelling the uneven places with clay and filling the ditches. Others bridged the small rivers and brooks and swept the road clear of pebbles and thorns, pulverizing the rocks that impeded the flow of water. They speedily built barriers to dam the small streams and deepened the ponds by digging in many places. They also sank wells where water was scarce, and built platforms on which men could rest. Lime was spread on the road, trees were planted where birds sang and the highway appeared as if adorned with banners. Sprinkled with the essence of sandalwood and decorated with flowering branches, it resembled the pathway of the Gods.

Those skilled in building prepared dwellings on pleasant sites near fresh water and fruit trees. Camps were set up for the army in accordance with Prince Bharata's instructions and all that was needed was provided.

Those acquainted with the auspicious planetary positions erected quarters for the illustrious Bharata. Bordered by deep moats with intersecting roads, these camps were as lofty as the blue mountain.

Stately white temples were set up, and rows of houses, bordering the roads, were adorned with flags.

The balconies on the buildings, elevated like dovecotes, resembled the abode of the gods, and the whole arena rivalled Indra's capital.

The way prepared for Prince Bharata, extended to the banks of the Ganges in whose cool waters fishes glided, as it flowed between woods and forests, and that royal highway, erected by skilled artisans, appeared as beautiful as the night sky, adorned by moon and stars.

CHAPTER 81

Vasishtha summons the royal assembly

YET a little of the enchanting night still remained, when the bards began to praise the prince; three hours before the sun rose, the great drums were struck with golden sticks, while conches were blown and the sound of countless musical instruments was heard.

The music filling the heavens increased the grief of Prince Bharata, who commanded it to cease, saying: "I am not the king." Then addressing Prince Shatrughna, he said: "Hear, O Brother, how unfitting are the praises now sung at the instance of Queen Kaikeyi. She has done us a great wrong. The king has departed to the regions of the gods and left me desolate. The future and the kingdom trembling in uncertainty, resembles a ship without a pilot drifting on the ocean. My father is dead and my mother, abandoning the path of virtue, has sent Shri Rama into exile."

The women of the palace, hearing the great prince lamenting, began to weep aloud pitifully. At this time, the great and illustrious Sage Vasishtha, versed in the science of government, appeared in the assembly hall, which was decorated with wrought gold, encrusted with gems. Attended by his followers, the spiritual preceptor of the royal dynasty, entered the council chamber, as Indra enters the celestial hall named Sudharma. Seated on a golden throne, which was covered with an excellent

carpet with the swastika design, Shri Vasishtha said to the messengers: " Go speedily and summon the learned brahmins, the counsellors, the warriors and the leaders of the army; matters of great importance await them! Bring also the royal princes together with their secretaries and ministers, Yudhajita and Sumantra!"

A great tumult now arose from those invited, who approached in chariots and on horses and elephants.

The counsellors seeing Prince Bharata drawing near, were gladdened by his sight as though King Dasaratha himself had entered the assembly.

The presence of Bharata added to the splendour of the court so that it appeared as when King Dasaratha was present, or as the clear waters of the ocean are enhanced by whales, alligators, shells and golden sand.

CHAPTER 82

The chiefs of the army prepare for departure

THE wise Bharata beheld the royal assembly presided over by the great Vasishtha and other venerable sages, resembling the night made glorious by the full moon. Illumined by these excellent ones, who occupied their seats, attired in splendid apparel, the conclave was of incomparable brilliance. The assembly of learned men resembled the beauty of the full moon on a winter's night.

The virtuous priest, Shri Vasishtha, beholding all the ministers and the chief counsellors, gently addressed Bharata, saying: " O Child, King Dasaratha, having practised virtue in his life, has bequeathed this rich and prosperous land to thee. Shri Ramachandra observing the vow of truth, in obedience to his father and in conformity with the duty incumbent on him, to vindicate his parents, has not failed to accomplish his father's command, as the moon does not abstain from shedding abroad its radiance. Now enjoy the possession of this peaceful kingdom

given to thee by thy father and brother ! To please thy counsellors, cause thyself to be installed. The kings of the north, south and west, the peers and titular sovereigns of the western boundary and the monarchs of many islands, will bring thee countless gems as offerings."

Hearing the words of his spiritual preceptor, Prince Bharata was distressed, knowing well that according to the ancient tradition of his dynasty, the eldest son inherits the kingdom. Calling Rama to remembrance, Shri Bharata resolved to seek out his elder brother. The throat of the youthful prince was choked and in tones resembling the cry of the swan, he plaintively reproached the venerable Guru for the impropriety of his command.

Bharata said : " O Holy Lord, how can I usurp the legitimate possession of one, who, learned in the Vedas and sciences, acquired by dwelling as a servant in the house of his Guru, knows their meaning well and follows them in practice ? How can one, born of King Dasaratha, striving to fulfil the law of dharma, take possession of the kingdom of Rama ? Not only does the kingdom belong to Rama, but I also belong to him. O Holy One, may thy counsels accord with righteousness ; King Dasaratha owned this kingdom as did King Dilipa and Nahusha before him, so should the virtuous Prince Rama, the eldest and most excellent son, inherit the kingdom !

" If, as instructed by thee, I accept it, it would be a great sin and worthy of an evil-doer, not in accordance with the way that leads to heaven and I should be adjudged the destroyer of the House of Ikshwaku. I abhor the wrong committed by my mother, and I offer salutations to Rama residing in the forest ; I will follow him, he alone is king and worthy of ruling the three worlds ! It were easy for him to administer this kingdom."

All seated in the assembly, devoted to Rama, having listened to the righteous words of Bharata, shed tears of joy. Once again Shri Bharata spoke, saying : " If I fail to bring back Shri Rama then I will dwell there with him in the forest as Lakshmana has done. O Ye Wise Men, accompany me to the forest and with your good help, I will try every means to persuade him to return ; skilled excavators, engineers and carpenters have been sent forward by me to render the road passable."

The lover of his brother, Shri Bharata, turning to the royal counsellors, addressed the wise Sumantra seated near them and said: "Go speedily and summon the army in my name to accompany me to the forest and bring the leaders here."

Sumantra gladly carried out the commands of Prince Bharata. The military commanders were filled with joy at the order of Prince Bharata to proceed with the army to recall Shri Rama. In every home, wives joyfully urged their husbands to go with all speed and bring back Shri Rama.

The leaders of the army riding their swift horses or in bullock carts and chariots gave the order to march. His preceptor the Guru Vasishtha being near, Shri Bharata said to Sumantra who was at his side, "Speedily prepare my chariot". Sumantra replied with reverence "Be it so" and highly pleased brought the chariot to which excellent horses were yoked. The Prince, filled with fortitude, illustrious, of fixed vows and a hero of the region of truth, resolving to recall Shri Rama from the forest, addressed Sumantra saying: "O Sumantra, mobilise the army and order my friends and the chiefs of the people to be prepared. I desire to recall Rama for the good of the world."

As instructed by the great prince, Sumantra speedily issued the command to the chiefs of the army and the friends of Bharata, fully explaining its purpose. In every dwelling the brahmins, the warriors, the merchants and the labourers brought together camels, chariots, mules, elephants and excellent horses.

CHAPTER 83

The whole army reaches the river Ganges

EARLY in the morning, the prince rose and mounting an excellent chariot, set out in haste, desirous of seeing Rama. Shri Bharata's chariot was preceded by ministers on horseback and priests in coaches and shone like the vehicle of the sun. Nine thousand richly bedecked elephants and sixty thousand carts

with archers, together with a hundred thousand troops, accompanied the self-controlled prince, the devotee of truth. Kaikeyi, Sumitra and the renowned Kaushalya riding in resplendent chariots, went forward to bring Rama home. The multitude of the twice born proceeding from the capital, conversed solely of Shri Ramachandra and listened only to that which related to him. They said: "When shall we behold Shri Rama, that cloud-complexioned, mighty armed one, of fixed purpose; the destroyer of the grief of the world? As the rising sun ends the darkness of the earth, so by the mere beholding of Shri Rama will our grief disappear."

Conversing thus of Rama and embracing each other, the citizens went forward, filled with gladness.

The foremost merchants of Ayodhya who had received permission from Bharata to accompany him, also those who had not been so favoured and others, went forward happily to meet Rama. Skilful engravers, potters, weavers and workers in gems, those who made fans of peacocks' feathers, woodcutters, plasterers, workers in glass and ivory, masons and perfumers, famous goldsmiths, makers of woollen cloth, washermen, masseurs, appliers of unguents, physicians and those who fumigated the dwellings with incense, also retailers of wine were present. Fullers, tailors, chiefs of villages, cowherds, dancing men and women, fishermen, and countless Vedic scholars of subdued mind, devoted to Rama, followed Prince Bharata in carts drawn by bullocks. All apparelled in pure raiment, their bodies anointed with red sandalwood, mounted on vehicles of various kinds, followed in the wake of Prince Bharata. The leaders of the army joyfully accompanied the prince, now going forth to bring Prince Rama home.

Mounted in chariots, palanquins, bullock carts or on horses and elephants, the people proceeded a considerable distance and reached the banks of the Ganges at Shrangaverapur, where the friend of Shri Rama, Guha, dwelt with his people, guarding his country with vigilance. Arriving at the banks of Shri Gunga, the haunt of the chakravaka[1] bird, those following the prince halted. The eloquent Bharata, seeing the beautiful Ganges, reviewed his troops and said to his ministers:—

[1] Chakravaka bird—Brahmany duck.

" Let the whole army camp here to-night, to-morrow we will cross the river. Now I desire to offer a libation to the spirit of my father, the king ! "

His counsellors replied, " Be it so, O Prince ", and caused the people to halt there, each according to his rank. The saintly Bharata alone in his tent, on the banks of the Ganges reflected anxiously how he might best bring Shri Rama home.

CHAPTER 84

Guha, chief of the ferrymen, is filled with apprehension

OBSERVING the great army of Bharata encamped on the river bank, Guha was filled with apprehension, and said to his followers : " My Friends, this great army which is occupying the river banks, is not to be numbered even in imagination. Assuredly Prince Bharata has come here with evil intent, since the flag of his dynasty flies over his tent. Either he is come to bind and destroy me, or he is going to slay Rama who is exiled by his father, and helpless ! Perchance the son of Kaikeyi desires to slay Rama in order to gain complete possession of the kingdom. But Rama, the son of Dasaratha, is my Lord, my Supporter and my Friend, I command you, therefore, to don your armour and take up arms, lining the banks of the Ganges for the protection of Rama. Let my servants and the troops living on fruit, roots and flesh guard the ferry boats of the Ganges. Let five hundred boats be manned with their crews, and let each be guarded by youthful watermen well armed and accoutred. See that they are vigilant. If Prince Bharata be well disposed towards Rama, his army may cross the Ganges to-day."

Thus, mobilising his troops and servants, Guha the chief of ferrymen, taking gifts of fish, flesh and honey, went to meet Prince Bharata. Seeing Guha approaching, the excellent Sumantra said to Bharata : " This Guha attended by a thousand kinsmen is the king of this place, he is a native of these parts

and is fully acquainted with the forest, he is a friend of thy brother, Shri Rama. Therefore, O Prince, let him be admitted in audience to thee, he assuredly knows the place where Rama and Lakshmana dwell."

Hearing the words of the sagacious Sumantra, Bharata said: "Go and tell Guha that I desire to meet him."

The sanction of Prince Bharata being given, Guha with the chiefs of his people approached the prince and thus addressed him: "O Lord, consider this country as thine own domain; not being acquainted with thine intention, I am unable to offer thee a fitting welcome. This inconsiderable kingdom is thine and we also are thine! We entreat thee to abide in thy servant's house. I have brought roots, fruits and flesh both fresh and dried for thee and other products of the forest for thy use. It is my hope that thine army remain here to-night as my guests; may we have occasion to serve thee, O Prince; to-morrow thou canst go forward with thine army."

CHAPTER 85

He is filled with joy on hearing of Prince Bharata's intention

THE wise Bharata listened to the words of the chief of ferrymen and revealed his purpose to him, stating his reasons thus: "O Friend of my elder brother, thy hospitality is great, since thou desirest to entertain so great an army as accompanies me."

Prince Bharata then addressed Guha once more in gentle and well-chosen words, and said: "O Chief of the Nishadas, by what way shall I proceed to the hermitage of the Sage Bharadwaja? The valley of the Ganges being flooded is difficult to cross."

Guha, acquainted with all the paths and inaccessible parts of the forest, replied with great humility: "O Illustrious Prince, have no anxiety! These, my kinsmen, armed with bows and arrows, fully acquainted with the forest, shall accompany thee, and I also shall follow thee in person. But observing thy great

army, I am filled with apprehension. Art thou going to approach Rama, urged by some evil intent?"

Shri Bharata, whose heart was pure as the stainless heavens, answered him in sweet accents, saying: "O Guha! May the time never come when I cause him distress. Do not look on me with fear O Friend; Rama, my elder brother, is to me equal to my father himself! O Guha, I go to bring back Shri Rama from the forest. Do not impute any evil motive to me! O Friend, this is the truth and the truth alone."

Guha was filled with joy on hearing the words of Prince Bharata and again addressed him saying: "O Bharata, blessed art thou. In the whole world, I see none equal to thee, since thou desirest to relinquish a great empire that has fallen to thee without any effort of thine own. Thy fame in the world will live forever, since thou, suffering distress, didst go forth to bring back Shri Rama."

While Prince Bharata and Guha were thus conversing, the sun set and the night drew on. Gratified with the converse and hospitality of Guha, his army fully refreshed, Shri Bharata entered his tent to rest. But the prince, whose heart formerly had been unacquainted with grief and who was patient and free from sin, which is the chief cause of suffering, was yet overcome by pain on account of Rama. Sorrow for Raghava consumed him inwardly, as a fire consumes a withered and hollow tree in the forest. The perspiration caused by the fire of grief ran down his body, as the snow flows from the Himalayan peaks melting under the heat of the sun.

By the mountain, the peak of which was sorrow, the recollection of Rama the rocks, his sighs the mineral charged streams, his desolation the forest, and weariness the promontories, his deep anxiety the wild beasts, his restlessness the herbs, by this mountain of affliction was Shri Bharata overwhelmed.

Assailed by unspeakable anguish, the prince sighed heavily and almost bereft of reason, unconscious of his body, like a bull driven from the herd, was deprived of all rest.

Guha approaching with his friends and kinsmen, embracing Shri Bharata, gently began to reassure him, regarding his elder brother.

CHAPTER 86

Guha tells of Shri Rama's stay by the sacred river

THE dweller in that dense forest, Guha, began to console the virtuous and affectionate prince, whose love for the pious Lakshmana and Shri Ramachandra was unwavering, and said: " O Lord, when the valiant Lakshmana, well armed, was keeping watch over the then sleeping Rama, I said to him, ' O Friend, a soft couch is prepared for thee, sleep thereon at ease, O Prince of Raghu, those dwelling in the forest are accustomed to hardship but thou art worthy of comfort, we will keep guard over Shri Rama this night. O Prince, there is none in the world so dear to us as Rama. Be not anxious, we will keep watch over Shri Rama ; do thou rest. By the grace of Rama, I hope to acquire great renown and the limitless wealth of dharma in this world. Therefore, O Prince, I will protect my friend, Shri Rama who is reposing with Sita ! My kinsmen will keep watch ; nothing in the forest is unknown to me, who constantly traverse it ; I could challenge a great army with success, should it venture to attack Shri Rama ! "

" O Lord, the illustrious Lakshmana, established in virtue, answered me saying : ' O Guha, when the virtuous Rama and Sita are resting on the naked earth, how should I occupy an easy couch ? How can any of the comforts of life or life itself be mine if Shri Rama does not also enjoy them ? O Guha, behold Shri Rama, capable of subduing the gods and demons, resting on a bed of grass. Through great austerity and penance was Shri Dasaratha blessed with a son, like unto himself. Assuredly, the king will not long survive the exile of Shri Rama, and the land will soon become widowed. The women will lament loudly and then grow silent. I fear lest my Father, Queen Kaushalya and my mother Sumitra will not survive. Perchance my mother will continue to live in expectation of the return of Shatrughna, but Kaushalya, the mother of that great hero will surely die ! The king desired to transfer the throne to Prince Bharata, but this ambition will not be realised by him. A great and honourable duty will be fulfilled in performing

the funeral ceremonies for my sire. The capital of the king abounding with beautiful terraces and parks, pleasant highways and tall houses encrusted with gems, crowded with horses, elephants and chariots, resounding with music, furnished with pleasure grounds, where happy and healthy people gather, is blessed by those who walk therein. O Guha, shall we, returning with Rama, the fulfiller of firm vows, when the fourteen years of exile are over, joyfully enter Ayodhya in his company ? "

Guha said : " O Prince, thus keeping watch, the mighty Lakshmana, bearing his bow and arrows, passed the night. When the clear sun rose, the two princely brothers, on this selfsame bank of the sacred river caused their beautiful locks to be matted and were then conveyed by me, in safety, over the Ganges.

The royal brothers, heroic, resplendent and the subduers of their enemies, their hair matted, attired in bark, armed with bow and quiver, departed with Sita, looking back at me, like mighty elephants."

CHAPTER 87

How Shri Rama spent his first night of exile

HAVING heard the moving tale related by Guha, Prince Bharata began to reflect on Rama. That tender prince of powerful arms, whose shoulders resembled a lion's and whose eyes were like the lotus, who was patient, youthful and charming in appearance yet sad at heart, at length sank to the ground unconscious, like an elephant stricken to the heart by a goad.

Prince Shatrughna ever in attendance on Bharata, deeply afflicted by his state, embracing his body, wept aloud. Then all the mothers of Prince Bharata, emaciated with fasting and sorrow for their deceased lord, surrounded him, lying unconscious on the earth. The pious Queen Kaushalya approaching, raised Bharata up and pressed him to her breast. The ascetic queen, the lover of her son, straining him to her bosom as if he were

her own child, weeping, enquired of him, saying: " O My Son, art thou afflicted by pain? The life of this royal family wholly depends on thee! O Child, Shri Rama has gone to the forest with Lakshmana, I live only if I behold thy face. King Dasaratha being dead, thou alone art the protector of the people. O Child, hast thou heard aught against Lakshmana or my only son, who, with his wife is gone to the forest?"

The renowned Bharata returning to his normal consciousness, consoled the weeping Kaushalya and then addressed Guha: " O Guha, where did my brother pass the night here? What did he eat, on what couch did he rest? Where did Sita and Lakshmana dwell?"

Guha, the King of Nishadas, gladly related how he had entertained his gracious guest, Shri Rama. He said, " O Bharata, rice, other foods and fruit in abundance were placed by me, before Shri Rama. To please me, that hero of the realm of truth, Shri Ramachandra, accepted the gifts, but recollecting his duty as a kshatriya did not partake of them. He said: " O Friend, we are warriors and it is our duty to give all to others, not accepting any gift for ourselves."

That night, the great-hearted Rama, having with Sita drunk the water brought by Shri Lakshmana, retired to rest, fasting. Shri Lakshmana finishing the water that was left over, all observed silence and performed the evening devotion with concentration. Thereafter the son of Sumitra brought kusha grass and spread it on the earth to serve as a couch for Rama. As Shri Rama and Sita rested there, Shri Lakshmana washed their feet in pure water and then moved to a distance to mount guard over them.

O Prince, here is that Ingudi tree, and here is the couch of grass on which Rama and Sita slept. That hero, Shri Lakshmana with his quiver filled with arrows, bound to his body, donning gloves made of goha-skin, drawing the string of his bow, paced round and round at a distance, guarding the royal pair.

I also, O Prince, surrounded by my kinsmen, armed with an excellent bow, kept watch through the night, protecting Shri Ramachandra, who resembled Indra.

CHAPTER 88

Prince Bharata sleeps on the same spot where Shri Rama had rested

SHRI BHARATA with his counsellors reverently approached the Ingudi tree and looked with love on the grassy couch. He said to his mothers: "This grass was pressed by the royal frame of the illustrious Ramachandra, who passed the first night of exile in this place. It ill became the great and wise son of King Dasaratha to sleep on the bare earth! How could Shri Rama, who ever reposed on a soft couch, sleep on the naked ground? Shri Rama who dwelt in a seven-storied palace, the floors of which were studded with gold and silver flowers, overlaid with soft carpets of many a hue on which marvellous floral designs were woven, the whole fragrant with the perfume of sandalwood and ambergris, and which resembled the clouds; where the cries of parrots and mainas were constantly heard and cool air flowed uninterruptedly through shafts; where the walls inlaid with gold and silver resembled the Meru mountain: in such a palace, Shri Rama was accustomed to rest, awakened each morning by the sweet music of the royal musicians and the gentle tinkling of women's anklets, and duly praised by the bards, panegyrists and ministers, in verse and song. To-day, he sleeps on the naked earth and hears the cry of jackals and other wild beasts. This matter is past belief, it resembles a dream! I consider nothing more powerful than the will of the Lord; how otherwise should the son of King Dasaratha be seen sleeping on the earth? How could the daughter of King Janaka, that beautiful princess, the beloved daughter-in-law of King Dasaratha, sleep on the naked ground?

"O Mother, here is my brother's couch, on it he tossed, crushing the grass by the weight of his limbs. It would seem that Shri Sita rested here also, wearing her ornaments, since I perceive particles of gold lying here and there. O Mother, see Sita's scarf became entangled here, for in this place I see threads of silk! Whether it be hard or soft, the couch of her lord is sweet to a woman! See! The young and tender Sita,

devoted to her husband, experienced no smart, resting here. Oh! I am undone! What a merciless wretch am I! On my account, Shri Ramachandra and his spouse lay on this hard couch! Alas that Shri Rama, deprived of kingly felicity, though born of a royal line, dear to all and the cause of universal joy, whose complexion resembles the blue lotus, whose eyes are slightly red,[1] charming to look upon, not meriting tribulation, should have to sleep on the naked earth.

"Blessed and fortunate is Lakshmana, who followed his brother in the days of adversity! Fruitful is the life of Princess Sita who, thus accompanied her lord to the forest. Wretched are we, bereft of Shri Rama; nor are we certain that he will allow us to serve him. King Dasaratha, being dead, and Shri Rama having entered the forest, the earth appears to me like a boat without a pilot. None desires to usurp the place spiritually reserved for him, who dwells in the forest. To-day the capital is empty and unprotected, horses and elephants wander here and there unconfined, there being none to control them; the gates of the city are left open and unguarded; the army is melancholy and indifferent to the defence of the capital! Ayodhya externally without protection and bereft of purpose, is in a sorry state. Even its enemies turn from it, as men turn away from poisoned food!

"From to-day, assuming an ascetic garb, I will sleep on the earth and live on fruit and roots. I shall live in the forest for the remainder of the term which Rama has to discharge, so that his vow may be fulfilled. My brother Shatrughna shall dwell with me in the forest, while Lakshmana returns with Rama to protect the capital! The learned brahmins will install Shri Rama in Ayodhya! I entreat the gods to fulfil the desire of my heart. If Rama, however, will not grant my request, I will remain in the forest as his servant, but how should he reject my appeal? Is he not compassionate towards his devotees?"

[1] This is said to be one of the marks of a divine Incarnation.

CHAPTER 89

The army crosses the holy river

BHARATA having slept on the same spot where Shri Rama had lately rested, and the night being over, called Shatrughna, and said to him: "Arise, O Brother, may good attend thee! The day has dawned, sleep no more! Please summon Guha, the chief of the Nishadas, so that he may convey our army across the river."

Shatrughna answered: "O Noble One, I am awake. I was not able to sleep, for like thee I have been meditating on Shri Rama!"

As these two, the chiefs of men, stood conversing together, Guha approaching, said with humility: "O Prince, didst thou rest at ease, on the river bank? Did any disturbance visit thee or thine army?"

Hearing these words of Guha uttered with affection, Shri Bharata answered him, saying: "O King, we have passed this night in peace, having been highly honoured by thee. Now let thy servants convey our army over the river."

Guha hastily returned to his city and spake thus to his servants and relatives: "Brothers, arise, awake, may you ever be fortunate! Bring boats to the bank and convey the army over the river!"

Thus addressed, the ferrymen arose and gathering five hundred boats together, brought them to the bank. A special barge that was seaworthy, named "Swastika", hung with large bells and flying banners with apertures for air, was also furnished, whereon white woollen rugs were spread like carpets, small bells tinkling melodiously when it sailed. This barque was steered by Guha himself. On it stepped the illustrious Princes Bharata and Shatrughna with the Queens Kaushalya and Sumitra, and other ladies of high degree, preceded by their spiritual preceptors, the priests and learned brahmins; finally, the baggage was loaded.

At the time of departure, the noise of those burning the residue left by the army, of those who plunged into the holy Ganges and the porters bearing the baggage, ascended to the sky. The

boats, crowded with attendants, guarded by picked ferrymen, sailing swiftly, conveyed them over the river. Many vessels contained women only, while others were filled with horses or bullocks, carts, cattle and mules.

Reaching the other bank of the river, the people disembarked, the ferrymen and Guha's relatives playing diverse games in the water as they returned. Some of the elephants, resembling mountains as they moved, were driven across by their mahouts, others crossed in boats, some on rafts and some swam. Guha's servants ferried the army over the river, before taking their morning bath. During the period of Maitra, following on the sunrise, the army crossed the sacred stream and entered the charming forest.

Arriving at holy Prayaga, the magnanimous Bharata spoke encouraging words to the army and ordered them to camp at ease. Then the prince accompanied by the Guru Vasishtha and other priests, went to see the Sage Bharadwaja.

Approaching the hermitage of that learned and illumined sage, the son of Brihaspati, they beheld in the dense and delightful forest, charming huts thatched with leaves.

CHAPTER 90

Prince Bharata with Shri Vasishtha visit the Sage Bharadwaja's hermitage

BHARATA, beholding the hermitage of the Sage Bharadwaja, leaving his army a league behind and laying aside his weapons and royal apparel, attired in a simple silken garment, proceeded on foot, preceded by his preceptor. Perceiving the sage himself, he left his counsellors and followed Shri Vasishtha only. The great ascetic Bharadwaja, beholding Prince Bharata approaching, rising from his seat, commanded his disciples to bring the arghya. The muni advancing to greet Shri Vasishtha, Prince Bharata offered salutations to him, the sage recognizing him as the son of King Dasaratha. The Sage Bharadwaja then calling

for the ritual appointments presented them with the arghya, and refreshed them with fruits; he then enquired respecting their welfare and if all were well in Ayodhya. Then he asked concerning the state treasury and the ministers, but, knowing the king to be dead, he made no enquiry concerning him.

In return, Shri Vasishtha and Bharata enquired as to the health of the sage, the state of his body, the sacred fire, his disciples, the deer and the birds. The great ascetic Bharadwaja informed them respecting all these things and then, prompted by the affection he bore for Shri Rama, said to Bharata: " O Prince, what occasion has brought thee hither, who art now the ruler of the kingdom? Tell me all. King Dasaratha, urged by his consort, banished Prince Rama to the forest, for the period of fourteen years. I trust that thou, desirous of enjoying the kingdom without reserve, art not the harbourer of ill-will to thy brother? "

Bitterly wounded by the rishi's words, Prince Bharata, his eyes suffused with tears, his throat choked with emotion, said: " O Lord, thou art all-knowing, if thou dost thus regard me, then my life is vain. I am in no way implicated in the fate of Shri Rama. Such villainy would never proceed from me. O My Lord, why dost thou charge me thus? That which my mother has done, on my account, is not approved by me, nor should I ever condone it. I go to gratify that great prince, by offering salutations to him and with the intention of bringing him back to the capital. O Divine One, this is my purpose, be pleased to tell me where Rama, now the lord of the earth, is to be found? "

Requested likewise by Shri Vasishtha and the other priests, Shri Bharadwaja, captivated by the words of Bharata, answered: " O Great One, thou art born in the illustrious family of Raghu, and it is therefore not a source of wonder that dutiful regard for thy preceptor, self-control and the following of the path of the wise, are all united in thee! By my yogic powers, the contents of thy heart were known to me, but I questioned thee, that thy resolution might be established, and thy fame proclaimed throughout the whole world. It is known to me where Shri Rama and Lakshmana conversant with righteousness, abide. They dwell on the great mountain Chittrakuta; do thou go

thither to-morrow. To-day, stay here with thy counsellors. O Wise One, do thou accede to my request."

Then Bharata, the prince of great renown, accepted the offer of the sage and remained all that night at his hermitage.

CHAPTER 91

Sage Bharadwaja entertains the whole army

PRINCE BHARATA, having decided to remain in the hermitage, the sage invited him to a repast. Shri Bharata said: " O Holy Lord, thou hast already entertained me with water, fruit and berries, I am wholly satisfied."

Shri Bharadwaja smilingly answered: " I know thee to be pleased with whatever is lovingly offered to thee, but, O Prince, I desire to entertain thy whole army, it is meet that thou accede to my request. O Great Prince, why art thou come, leaving thine army at a distance? Why didst thou come unattended by thine army? "

Hearing these words, Prince Bharata answered with humility: " O Lord, I did not come attended by mine army, in deference to thee. It becomes a king or a king's son to protect the hermitages of his kingdom! O Lord! I am accompanied by many horses and wild elephants occupying a vast area. Fearing lest they should destroy the trees, the thatched huts and defile the water of the ponds and wells, I came alone, leaving them behind."

Then the Maharishi Bharadwaja said: " Bring thine army hither."

Thus commanded, the prince brought his army thither. Entering the sacrificial pavilion, the rishi drank three times of the water there, and reciting a certain formula, sprinkled some on his body. Then invoking Vishwakarma[1] to provide the entertainment, and speaking slowly, he said: " I summon the celestial beings, Vishwakarma and Twashta, let them prepare

[1] Vishwakarma—the architect of the gods.

dwellings for the army. I desire to offer Prince Bharata hospitality, I therefore call upon the deities Yama, Varuna, Kuvera and also Indra. Let them assist me in providing the entertainment. I also summon all the rivers, flowing above or below from east to west and from west to east. Let some of these produce the delicious wine named Maireya[1] and that named Saura,[2] and also cool, sweet water, like the juice of the sugar cane. I summon further the heavenly musicians called Haha and Huhu, together with other divine beings and nymphs. I summon the dancing apsaras, Ghritachi, Vishwachi, Mishrakeshi, Alambusha, Nagadanta, Hema and Soma, who dwell in the Himalayas. I call on the dancing nymphs attendant on Brahma and Indra; let them attire themselves in beautiful apparel, bringing their instruments. I desire the celestial forest Chaitraratha to appear here, the leaves of whose trees are formed like beautiful damsels. I desire further foods of many kinds that can be chewed, sucked or licked, and various drinks to be prepared by the deity presiding over the moon. Let garlands of fresh flowers be made ready and beautiful goblets and different dishes of flesh be produced here instantaneously!"

By his yogic power and the proper recitation of the sacred mantras, the holy Sage Bharadwaja produced all that was necessary. Facing the east in the posture of invitation, Shri Bharadwaja sat in meditation for a space. Then, one by one, the gods appeared before him. The cool, slow and fragrant breezes blowing from the Malaya and Dadura mountains, tempered the heat. The clouds rained down flowers and the sound of the divine dundubhis (drums) was heard; delightful zephyrs began to blow, nymphs danced, the celestial musicians sang and the notes of the vina were heard everywhere. The earth and the sky were filled with sweet and harmonious sounds, heard by all living beings. As the divine music continued, Bharata's army beheld the wonderful structure wrought by Vishwakarma. They perceived the whole area within a radius of four miles, to be covered with a carpet of green and glistening grass sparkling like a green emerald. Its beauty was enhanced

[1] Maireya or Mireya—A kind of intoxicating liquor made of the blossoms of Lythrum Fructicosum with sugar.
[2] Saura—a celestial drink, "Saura" meaning "relating" to the sun.

by silwa,[1] kapitha,[1] amlaki[1] and mango trees. A wood appeared wherein people could wander, also a divine stream flowing between banks adorned by various trees. Beautiful white mansions were erected, with stables for elephants and horses. Palaces with their balconies decorated with leaves and flowers were to be seen, and others adorned with green and flowery sprays and garlands of pure white blossoms sprinkled with scented water. These dwellings contained square courts serving as reception halls with space for palanquins, and coaches. Food of all kinds, rice, the juice of sugar cane and every variety of confection was to be found there, with curry puffs, pancakes and other delicious dishes served in clean vessels, while excellent carpets and seats were spread for relaxation, and couches with spotless coverings and quilts.

Entering these mansions with the permission of the Sage Bharadwaja, Prince Bharata was followed by his servants, ministers and priests who, perceiving all to be well furnished, were highly gratified.

In one of the mansions, a room was set apart containing a throne where retainers holding the canopy and chamara were in attendance. Bharata with his ministers, circumambulated the royal dais as if it were occupied by Shri Rama and bowing to it respectfully, Shri Bharata, holding the chamara, occupied a lower seat, the counsellors, priests and army commanders assuming positions in accordance with their respective rank.

Now, at the command of the holy sage, streams of milk, thickened with rice, flowed before Bharata's eyes. Beautiful houses, washed with quicklime, appeared on the river banks. Twenty thousand youthful women, enchantingly attired and wearing beautiful ornaments came there at the instance of Brahma. Kuvera also sent twenty thousand lovely damsels adorned with gold, gems and pearls. Further twenty thousand nymphs from the region of Indra appeared, whose beauty caused men to lose their reason. Narada, Gopha and other brilliant musicians began to sing and play before Bharata, and the celestial nymphs to dance in the presence of the prince, at the rishi's command. All the flowers most highly esteemed in the celestial gardens among the gods, were seen at Prayaga, through the power

[1] For plants and trees, see separate glossary.

of Bharadwaja. The trees applauded, the bahadur tree performed on the cymbals and the pipal danced, through the influence of the sage, and those named devaparna, tala and kuraka assumed the form of dwarfs! Plants by the name of shingsapa, amalaki and jambu, and twining creepers such as the jasmine and mallika, taking on the shape of women in the hermitage of Bharadwaja, cried out: "O Wine-Bibbers, drink! O Hungry Ones, eat kheeva! Come, fill yourselves with the various kinds of meat!"

Each person was bathed in the cool river and attended by seven or eight beautiful maidens with lustrous eyes, who massaged their body with oil and unguents. Their bath completed, many women dried them with soft cloths and gave them sweetened water, tasting like ambrosia, to drink.

The keepers attended carefully to the horses, elephants, mules, camels and bullocks. Those steeds belonging to the royal stables and ridden by great generals, were fed by the grooms on bundles of sugar cane and parched and sweetened rice, their attendants and mahouts could hardly recognize their charges. The soldiery were now intoxicated with wine and indulging in every pleasure! Each was gratified in whatever he desired; their bodies anointed with sandalwood paste and united with the nymphs in amorous dalliance, they exclaimed: "We will neither go to Ayodhya nor enter the Dandaka forest! Let Bharata live at ease and Shri Rama dwell in the forest!"

Thus did the warriors and grooms express themselves in the state of inebriation, while thousands of soldiers, in exultation, shouted aloud: "Verily, this is heaven!" Running hither and thither with garlands round their necks, innumerable soldiers danced, sang and laughed. Though they had partaken to the full of excellent dishes, sweet as nectar, yet when they perceived fresh articles of food, they could not restrain themselves from eating anew!

Thousands of messengers, servants and the wives of the soldiery, putting on colourful raiment, displayed themselves with pride. Elephants, horses, camels, deer and birds were fully satisfied; none wanted for anything! No one, in the army of Bharata, was seen in soiled garments or hungry or

unkempt, none was seen with an unclean countenance or uncombed hair!

The men beheld countless dishes of mutton, pork, venison and other meats cooked in fruit-juices and fried in butter with cloves, caraway seeds and lentils simmering gently in them. Thousands of vessels were filled with spiced rice, garnished with flowers and flags. All were speechless with wonder on beholding them! Within a radius of five miles, the wells were filled with frumenty (kheeva) and cows like Kamadhenu fulfilled every desire! The trees dripped honey and the lakes were filled with the sparkling wine Maireya, and banked with dressed viands such as deer, chickens and peacocks. Hundreds and thousands of dishes were provided, and myriads of vessels filled with curds, mixed with caraway seeds, ginger and other fragrant spices, were served there. Lakes of yoghourt and milk, together with heaps of sugar, were to be seen on the river banks, as also fragrant crushed leaves and unguents with large pots of sandal-wood paste, mirrors and towels! An abundance of sandals and shoes were provided, whilst antimony, combs, brushes, parasols, bows and quivers, armour and ornamental seats were placed here and there! Tanks, full of liquid mixed with herbs to promote digestion, were taken to the banks of lakes where descent was easy, and where the people could bathe freely and drink when they pleased! These lakes were filled with pure water, abounding in lotuses and fringed with tender grass of blue and emerald hue; here, resting places for the beasts were also to be found.

Prince Bharata's companions were astounded at the entertainment provided by the Maharishi Bharadwaja. All passed the night in amusement, as in the garden of Indra!

At dawn, the rivers, celestial musicians and nymphs took leave of the maharishi and returned to their own abode. But Prince Bharata's followers were still flushed and inebriated, their bodies painted with sandalwood, the flower garlands in heaps like mountains, lying everywhere, scattered and trampled on by men and beasts.

CHAPTER 92

Prince Bharata with the army departs for Mount Chittrakuta

PRINCE BHARATA, having passed the night in enjoyment of the entertainment provided, early in the morning, desirous of seeing Rama, approached the muni.

With joined palms, he stood before the holy rishi who was engaged in the fire ritual.

The Sage Bharadwaja enquired of him, saying: " O Sinless Prince, didst thou pass the night in my hermitage in peace? Are all satisfied with the meagre entertainment provided by me?"

Shri Bharata, offering salutations to the maharishi, who had come out from his hermitage replied: " O Blessed Lord, I and my whole army have been rendered completely happy in thy hermitage, thou hast fully satisfied us all. My people have passed the night agreeably, they have slept in excellent houses and partaken of delicious dishes, and have lost all sense of the fatigue caused by the journey. O Great Sage, now allow me to take leave of thee and go to my brother; look on me with favour, I beg of thee. O Wise One, how far from here is the hermitage of the pious Rama and which is the way thither?"

The sage, eminent in ascetic practices, replied to Bharata, who desired to see his brother: " O Prince, at ten miles' distance from here, in a field full of boulders, is the beautiful mountain named Chittrakuta! To the north of that mountain flows the river Mandakini, winding through flowery forests, its banks planted with blossoming trees. O Friend, close to that river, on the Chittrakuta mountain, thou shalt find thy two brothers dwelling in a thatched hut. O Fortunate Prince, on the southern bank of the Yamuna, thou wilt see two paths, do thou take the right path with thine army, horses and elephants! This path will take thee to Shri Rama."

At the moment of departure the consorts of King Dasaratha, descending from their chariots, came to the place where the great sage was and stood encircling him. Among them the frail

and trembling Kaushalya and Sumitra touched the feet of the holy man. Then Kaikeyi, thwarted in her designs and despised by the whole world, touched the feet of the sage and circumambulated him. Grief-stricken, she stood at a little distance from Bharata, as the holy Bharadwaja addressed the prince, saying : " O Prince, I desire to be acquainted with thy mothers."

The ever eloquent Bharata answered humbly: " O Holy Lord, here is my father's chief queen, wretched and weakened through fasting, yet resembling a goddess. She is the mother of that Lion among men, the highly intrepid Prince Rama ! Comparable to Aditi who brought forth Prajapati, she has given birth to Raghava ! She, who leaning on her arm, stands with a sorrowful heart, like the branch of the karnikara tree stripped of its flowers, is the Queen Sumitra, the mother of those heroes of truth, Shri Lakshmana and Shatrughna. O Great Sage, she who has brought great affliction on these two chiefs of men and caused the death of King Dasaratha by separating him from his sons, who is given to anger and who is vain and shallow, esteeming herself favoured, who is highly ambitious and fickle and yet looks upon herself as free from imperfection, that cruel and wicked Kaikeyi, is my mother ! O Great Muni, it is she who has caused my great misfortune ! "

Unable to utter further, his throat choked with emotion, the prince began to sigh heavily, his eyes inflamed, breathing like a provoked serpent. Then the holy sage, acquainted with what should come to pass, answered saying: " My Son, do not reproach Queen Kaikeyi, the exile of Shri Rama will be productive of great good and the gods and danavas and the illustrious sages will gain great benefit from the presence of Shri Rama in the forest ! "

Hearing this, Bharata bowed low to the rishi and receiving his blessing, circumambulated him with reverence. Then craving permission from the sage to depart, he ordered his army to prepare to march.

The leaders of the forces mounted their horses, while others, ascending golden chariots, started on their journey. Elephants with howdahs fixed by golden chains and adorned with fluttering flags went forward, the bells hanging from the male and female tuskers causing a sound like the thunder of the clouds at the end

of the rainy season! The other vehicles large and small, conveying members of the royal family advanced also.

Shri Bharata, intent on seeing Rama, riding in a resplendent palanquin shining like the sun or moon, with his great army, moved towards the south, covering the earth like a vast cloud.

The horses and elephants were all contented and the vast concourse inspiring the wild deer and birds with terror, looked splendid as it entered the deep forest.

CHAPTER 93

They behold the hermitage of Shri Rama

As the mighty army traversed the forest, the leaders of the herds of wild elephants with their companions, ran away in alarm. Bears, leopards and other fierce beasts could be seen fleeing on the hilltops and by the banks of the river.

Supremely gratified, Prince Bharata proceeded in the midst of his soldiers who shouted as they marched. The army of the illustrious Bharata, resembled an ocean, whose waves spread over the earth or like the clouds covering the sky during the rainy season. The ground for miles was covered with elephants and horses, so that no trace of it could be seen.

Having marched a considerable distance, Shri Bharata, perceiving his animals to be fatigued, addressed the holy priest, Shri Vasishtha, saying: "This country appears to be as beautiful as described to me, I deem that we have reached that place spoken of by the Sage Bharadwaja. This mountain is Chittrakuta, and this is the Mandakini river, and this is the forest which, from a distance, resembled a blue cloud. These are the glorious peaks of Chittrakuta, which are being trodden by my great elephants! See, O Holy Guru, as the dark clouds pour down water in the rainy season, so do the elephants, whose trunks are scarred by the waving branches of the trees, scatter flowers on the hills.

"O Shatrughna, behold the lovely Chittrakuta mountain

sought after by the gods; everywhere herds of deer wander about enhancing its beauty, like crocodiles swimming gracefully in the sea. As clouds driven by the wind in winter adorn the sky, so do these deer running before the army, render the forest delightful.

" Our soldiers decorating their heads with flowers, resemble the people of the south who crown themselves with blossoms. See, O Shatrughna, the forest that appeared terrifying and seemed to breathe by being filled with men, resembles Ayodhya itself!

" The dust rising from the hoofs of the bullocks covers the sky and settles there, till the wind quickly dispels it, as if those things obstructing my vision of Shri Rama were being removed from my eyes. O Shatrughna, behold these horses yoked to the chariots with their charioteers, swiftly passing through the forest! And see those beautiful peacocks with long feathers, running in fear towards their habitation on the mountain. O Sinless Brother, this place appears enchanting to me and a fit abode for ascetics.

" How lovely are the spotted deer wandering about with their hinds; they appear as if studded with flowers. Let my leaders go forward and seek out the place where Shri Rama and Lakshmana dwell."

Hearing the words of Shri Bharata, the warriors bearing weapons in their hands, entered the forest and there perceived a spot where smoke was ascending. On beholding this, they returned to Prince Bharata and communicated to him their belief, that the two royal brothers dwelt where the smoke arose. They said: " If it be not Shri Rama and Lakshmana yonder, then surely it is some devotee who can inform us concerning the dwelling place of Raghava!"

Hearing this pleasing report, Shri Bharata addressed the leaders of the army saying: " Do you remain here, do not proceed further, I, with the holy Guru Vasishtha and Sumantra will go forward to that place."

Thus commanded the warriors halted and Shri Bharata looked towards the spot where the smoke was visible. Observing the smoke, the warriors, waiting at that place, rejoiced, believing the time for the meeting with Shri Rama was at hand.

CHAPTER 94

Shri Rama decides to spend his exile on the mountain

SHRI RAMA who had passed many days on that mountain, gratified Shri Sita by showing her many scenes of natural beauty, they themselves appearing as lovely as Indra and his consort.

Shri Rama said: " O Fortunate One, beholding the beauty of this pleasant mountain, no longer does the separation from my friends or my country cause me pain! O Centre of Delight! behold the loveliness of these peaks abounding in metals of various kinds, reaching the skies and frequented by birds of every species! These peaks, some of which shine like silver, some of which are ruddy, some yellow, some glittering with the splendour of the brilliant gems concealed in them; some sparkling with sapphire and crystal, and some resembling quick-silver and glittering like the stars! Though many lions and leopards abound in the forest, yet influenced by the pure nature of the ascetics dwelling here, they have ceased to follow their cruel instincts. Many varieties of birds have their nests on yonder hill, trees laden with fruit and flowers affording delightful shade, render the mountain enchanting!

" Here are mango, jambu, asana, lohdra, piyala, panasa, dhuva, ankotha, bhavya, tinisha, bilwa, tindura, bamboo, kasanari, arista, varana, madhuca, tilaka, vadari, amlaka, nipa, vetra, dhanwaria, vijaka and other trees.

" O Auspicious Princess, behold the ravishing loveliness of these hills where the wise kinneras wander in pairs, their swords and coloured apparel hanging on the branches. See the charming retreats of the vidya dharas[1] and their companions. These mountains with their cascades and bubbling springs appear like mighty elephants the ichor flowing from their foreheads.

" What mind would not be filled with delight by the breezes issuing from the caves of the mountain, redolent with fragrance, pleasing to the senses? O Peerless One, if it be for me to

[1] Vidya Dharas—" Possessors of Knowledge ", a class of deities attendan on Indra.

dwell here with thee and Lakshmana for innumerable years, no grief or anxiety will visit me. O Lovely Lady, on the mountain of Chittrakuta, rendered pleasant by a profusion of flowers and fruits, whose delightful peaks echo with the sweet song of birds, I am content to dwell! By residing here, two objects have been achieved, the fulfilment of my father's vow and the satisfaction of Prince Bharata. O Daughter of King Videha, behold this enchanting spot where self-control and asceticism are easily exercised. Say, art thou happy here? The discipline of residence in the forest is declared by royal sages to be a means to liberation. Our ancestors such as Manu have held that residence in the forest is the means of acquiring the form of the gods. Behold, O Princess, yonder mountain, adorned by thousands of rocks blue, yellow, purple and white. At night, the healing herbs shine like fire, lighting the crags with their radiance. See, O Princess, some of the caves resemble houses, some appear like flower gardens, all enhancing the glory of the mountain. It would seem that Chittrakuta has sprung forth from the earth and from every side appears incomparably beautiful. Observe, O Auspicious One, how those devoted to pleasure, have spread couches here and there, and covered them with azure lotuses overlaid with coverings of bark. See the faded garlands cast aside by them and the rinds of many fruits of which they have partaken.

" This mountain Chittrakuta, in variety of flowers and transparent waters, has surpassed the capital of Indra in loveliness. O Sita, I will pass the twelve years here with Prince Lakshmana and thee; pursuing the highest virtue and discipline, I shall thus protect my kingdom and earn merit."

CHAPTER 95

He points out the beauties of nature to Sita

HAVING pointed out the beauty of the hills to Sita, Raghava now showed her the pleasant river Mandakini issuing from the mountain. The lotus-eyed Lord addressed the daughter

of King Janaka, whose countenance resembled the moon, saying: "O Princess, behold the river Mandakini with its delightful banks frequented by swans, cranes and other water-fowl, abounding in flowering trees of different kinds, which cause it to resemble the river Sangandhika in the region of Kuvera. Its pleasant fords, where I desire to bathe, the waters of which have been rendered muddy by the herds of deer who have come to drink and recently departed, all these attract the heart. O Dear One, the ascetics attired in robes of bark and deerskin, bathe at stated seasons in this river. O Princess of beautiful eyes, here the munis observing strict and austere vows, stand with uplifted arms, worshipping the sun. The trees agitated by the breeze, cause the hills to appear as if they were dancing. The blossoms scattered by the force of the wind make it seem as if Chittrakuta were offering flowers to the river. O Auspicious One, here the waters of Mandakini sparkle like gems and there they form a sandy beach. Groups of perfect beings frequent the banks. O Princess, behold the heaps of flowers shaken down from the branches by the wind, and others floating through the air and falling into the river to be carried away by the water. O Kalyani, behold the wild geese standing in the shallows, uttering sweet cries to summon their mates or diverting themselves with them. O Lovely Sita, when I behold the Chittrakuta mountain and the river Mandakini in company with thee, I esteem it a greater joy than any Ayodhya could yield me. Come, O Sita, and let us two bathe in the river Mandakini, frequented by perfect beings who are endowed with inner and outer control and are devoted to the practice of austerity. O Princess, thou didst formerly play with thy maids of honour in Ayodhya, to-day amuse thyself with me in the Mandakini river, pelting me with red and white lotuses and splashing the waters over me. O Dear One, imagine those dwelling here to be the citizens of Ayodhya and the Mandakini to be the river Sarayu. O Sita, I am happy with thee, who art obedient to my command as is also Prince Lakshmana. O Beloved, bathing thrice a day with thee in the river and living on honey, fruits and berries, I feel no desire for the comforts of the kingdom of Ayodhya. Who will not be happy, dwelling on the banks of the river Mandakini, where herds of elephants

wander and lions and monkeys come to quench their thirst, and where flowers grow throughout the year?"

Thus Shri Rama conversed on many wondrous things concerning the Mandakini river with Sita and taking the hand of the princess, wandered with her over the blue and beautiful Chittrakuta mountain.

CHAPTER 96

They see the army approaching and Lakshmana vows to destroy it

HAVING shown Sita the beauties of the river Mandakini, Rama and Sita seated themselves on a rock. Feasting Videhi[1] with venison, Shri Rama, in order to please her, spoke in this wise: "This meat is pure and is rendered delicious by being roasted in the fire."

While thus conversing with Sita, he observed the dust rising like a cloud, stirred up by the feet of the approaching army of Bharata and heard the tramp of marching warriors at the sound of which the leaders of the elephants with their herds, ran hither and thither in agitation. Seeing the herds of elephants fleeing at the tumult caused by the army, Shri Rama said to Lakshmana: "O Lakshmana, Queen Sumitra is fortunate indeed to be thy mother. Is this warlike clamour issuing from the clouds? The herds of elephants dwelling in the dense forest, the wild buffaloes and the deer are fleeing away in terror! Has any king or prince come to hunt in the woods, or has some terrible and bloodthirsty beast entered the forest? Enquire into the matter, O Lakshmana! Even the birds are not carefree in their flight; it becomes thee to seek out the cause of this commotion."

Speedily climbing a shala tree, Shri Lakshmana looked in all directions. First he examined the eastern quarter, then he looked

[1] Videhi—a name of Sita, as daughter of the King of Videha.

towards the north and there he beheld a vast army composed of elephants, horses, chariots and well-armed infantry!

Describing the approaching army with its elephants, horses, chariots and flags, Shri Lakshmana said to Rama: "O Great One, put out the fire and let Sita enter the cave, do thou arm thyself and take up thy bow and arrow."

Shri Rama answered Lakshmana saying: "O Child, ascertain by the symbols on the flags to whom this army belongs."

The prince listened to Rama's words and burning with anger desirous of consuming the army, replied: "Without doubt, Bharata, having secured the throne has come to slay us both in order to enjoy rulership, unopposed! See, by that large and beautiful tree is a chariot with a white flag bearing the sign of a pomegranate tree. The soldiers mounted on swift moving horses are coming towards me. I see the riders on elephants also. O Hero, let us both, armed with bows and arrows, climb the hill, or clad in battle array, stand here fully prepared. We shall surely defeat Bharata. To-day, we shall subdue him on whose account all our sufferings have come to pass. O Rama, that Bharata, on whose account, thou, Sita and I, have been deprived of our kingdom and cast into tribulation, is approaching like an enemy. He must certainly be slain, O Prince, I see no sin in destroying him. It were no sin to slay one who seeks to injure thee. O Prince, he has already wronged thee; by slaying Bharata, thou canst acquire mastery over the whole earth. To-day, Kaikeyi, avid for the kingdom, will see her son slain in the field. Seeing Bharata slain by me, like a tree uprooted by an elephant, Kaikeyi will suffer great anguish! I shall slay Kaikeyi also, and her friends and Manthara too. O Bestower of Honour, I will free the world of the sinful Kaikeyi; to-day I will let loose my long restrained wrath on the forces of mine enemy, as a fire consumes dried grass. To-day, I will drench the fields of Chittrakuta with the blood of mine enemies. To-day, those elephants, wounded by my sharp arrows and those men slain by me, will be dragged hither and thither by wild beasts. To-day, I will redeem my vow, by destroying Bharata and his army with my bow and arrow."

CHAPTER 97

Shri Rama cannot believe Prince Bharata comes as an enemy

SEEING Lakshmana overcome with anger and desire for vengeance, Shri Rama sought to pacify him saying: " O Lakshmana, the learned warrior Bharata, fully armed, is coming to see us in person, of what value is shield or sword? What should I do with a kingdom obtained by slaying my brother Bharata, I having undertaken to fulfil my father's behests? I will never accept riches obtained by the slaying of relatives and friends which would be as acceptable to me as food mixed with poison! O Lakshmana, I promise thee, it is for the sake of my brothers that I desire to pursue virtue, legitimately acquired wealth, pleasures, and even the kingdom. O Lakshmana, I speak the truth, by this sign, touching my arms, 'I desire a kingdom only for the sake of supporting my brothers and securing their good'. O Charming Prince! The acquisition of the kingdom is not difficult to me, but O, My Brother, I do not even desire dominion of the celestial region if it can only be acquired by unrighteous means! O Dear One! May the Deity of Fire consume all that gives me joy, if it is not for thy good and to the advantage of Bharata and Shatrughna! It seems to me that when my dearest brother, ever devoted to me, returned to Ayodhya from the home of his maternal uncle, after hearing that we three, robed in bark had entered the forest, he, overwhelmed by affection and grief, set out hither to seek us! I see no other purpose for his advent here. Or it may be that Bharata, wroth with his mother has reproached her with bitter words and has come here to be reconciled with me. It is meet that Bharata should see me and I cannot believe that he comes as an enemy. What harm has Bharata ever done to us, O Brother, that to-day, thou assumest him to be against us? It is improper for thee to speak ill or harshly of Bharata. Those bitter things thou sayest of Bharata, thou hast in fact said of me. O Son of Sumitra, how should a father slay his son, or a brother slay his brother, whatever betide? If thou hast said all this on account of the kingdom, then I will desire Bharata to give thee

the kingdom. O Lakshmana, if I say to Bharata ' Give the crown to Lakshmana ', assuredly he will answer ' Be it so '."

Shri Lakshmana was profoundly humiliated by the words of Rama, his limbs and muscles contracted and he was sunk in shame. He said : " It appears that the Maharaja Dasaratha himself has come hither to see us."

Seeing Lakshmana abashed, Shri Rama answered : " I also believe my father is come to see us, and will seek to take us home to the capital, knowing how grievously we suffer in the forest ! "

" It may be, too, that the king, knowing Sita to be worthy of every happiness, will take her home. See, O Brother, two excellent horses of noble breed, swift as the wind, appear in view ! The great and aged elephant Shatrunjaya that carries my illustrious father, marches before the army, but I feel apprehensive for I do not behold the white umbrella of my renowned Lord ! O Lakshmana, descend from the tree."

The prince having descended in obedience to Shri Rama, stood before him with joined palms.

Shri Bharata meanwhile commanded his army not to approach or disturb the hermitage of Rama. The army with its elephants and horses occupied an area of seven miles and the prudent Bharata who, to please Rama, had rid himself of all egoity and employed only virtuous means, caused it to take up its position at some distance from the Chittrakuta mountain.

CHAPTER 98

Prince Bharata goes on foot to meet Shri Rama

THAT exalted one, Shri Bharata, truly obedient to the behests of his Guru, perceiving his army well lodged, proceeded on foot to meet Shri Rama. As soon as the army was encamped, he addressed Shatrughna in these words : " O Excellent One, thou with thy men and a few huntsmen, speedily search the forest and seek out Shri Rama's hermitage. Let Guha attended by a thousand of his warriors, armed with bows, arrows and swords,

search for Shri Rama in the forest. I, myself, in the company of the counsellors, citizens, elders and brahmins, will go on foot through the forest. I shall not rest till I have beheld the saintly Rama, the valiant Lakshmana and the most auspicious Sita. I shall not seek repose till I have looked on the shining countenance of Shri Rama, my elder brother. My mind will taste no peace till I have placed my forehead at the feet of Rama, that bear the marks of royalty. My soul will find no delight till I have placed Shri Rama on the ancestral throne and beheld him anointed with the holy water at the time of his coronation! Fortunate is Prince Lakshmana, who looks on the moon-like, lotus-eyed resplendent face of Rama, each day. Blessed is the daughter of King Janaka, who follows Shri Rama, the Lord of earth and ocean! Blessed also is Chittrakuta, equal to the Himalayas, on which Shri Rama dwells, as Kuvera and Chittraratha dwell in the forest. Blessed is this forest to-day, abounding in poisonous serpents and difficult to penetrate, because the mighty warrior Rama abides in it."

Thus speaking, the valiant Prince Bharata entered the forest on foot. The chief of eloquent persons, the pious Bharata, reached the centre of the forest, where blossoming and fruitful trees adorned the mountain heights. Climbing a shala tree, he saw the smoke rising from the fire in Rama's hermitage. The prince with his friends rejoiced like those who have crossed the ocean, to find the dwelling place of Rama. Finding that Shri Ramachandra dwelt on the mountain frequented by ascetics, Shri Bharata, leaving his army behind, in the company of Guha speedily started for the hermitage.

CHAPTER 99

The four brothers meet with tears of joy

SHRI BHARATA with great eagerness pointed out the indications of the position of Shri Rama's hermitage to his brother Shatrughna. He appealed to Shri Vasishtha to bring his mothers

there speedily, while he, devoted to his elder brother, hastily went on before. Sumantra followed Shatrughna, who walked behind Bharata and who was equally anxious to behold Rama. The prince, proceeding, at length descried the hut thatched with leaves in the midst of the hermitages of the ascetics, and beheld before it a heap of broken wood and flowers plucked for worship. To mark the site of the ashrama, Shri Rama and Lakshmana had bound kusha grass and strips of cloth to the trees. He perceived also great heaps of the dung of deer and buffaloe, dried for fuel, to be used in winter.

The illustrious and mighty Bharata going forward, spoke measured words to his brother and counsellors, saying: " I deem we have reached the place spoken of by the Sage Bharadwaja, and that the river Mandakini is not far distant from here! Prince Lakshmana has bound strips of cloth to the trees, so that when fetching water on a dark night, he may know the way back to the hermitage. This appears to be the road traversed by the great elephants who were roaring in the forest. I perceive the black smoke rising from the ascetics' sacrificial fire. Here, I shall behold that Lion among men, Shri Rama, the great preceptor, seated in majesty, like a resplendent sage."

Proceeding a little further, Prince Bharata reached the river Mandakini on Chittrakuta, and addressing his companions, said: " That chief of men, a very god among living beings, is seated in this lonely forest in the posture of an ascetic. Woe unto me, wretched is my life and birth, on account of which the most resplendent Lord of all, Shri Ramachandra is plunged in this affliction and dwells in the forest deprived of all joy! Despised by men because of this, I will now fall at the feet of Rama and Sita in order to propitiate them."

While still lamenting, Bharata perceived the hut thatched with leaves, pure and pleasant, covered with the leafy boughs of sala, tala and other trees, resembling an altar covered with kusha grass.

Here and there mighty bows and shields covered with gold, wielded in battle, hung, adding to the beauty of the place, and nearby stood a quiver of arrows, bright as the rays of the sun, and keen as the serpents with shining hoods of the Bhagawati

river. There also were two scimitars in scabbards of gold and two shields emblazoned with golden flowers, also many deerskins and gloves with gold embroidered gauntlets. That habitation was impregnable as a cave and unassailable by the herds of wild deer.

Bharata discerned in this dwelling, Shri Rama seated near the altar, resplendent as fire. For a long time, Shri Bharata gazed on the beauty of the scene. He saw Rama sitting, his matted locks coiled on the crown of his head, shining like a flame, his body clad in a robe of bark, covered with the skin of a black antelope, his shoulders resembling a lion's, his arms were long, his eyes like lotuses, that ruler of earth and ocean, the sovereign of eternal decrees! Shri Bharata beheld that righteous one with Lakshmana and Sita, seated on a platform strewn with kusha grass, appearing like the eternal Brahma.

Beholding him seated thus, the pious Bharata was overpowered with sorrow and affection, and ran towards him, his throat choked with grief, weeping and lamenting. Though the pain was past restraining, he yet mastered it and spoke: "Alas! my elder brother, worthy of a seat in the royal assembly, beloved of his counsellors, is to-day associating with wild beasts in the forest. He, deserving of apparel adorned with thousands of golden coins, is sitting, clad in a deerskin, in order to practise the obligations of righteous living. Shri Rama, who was formerly adorned with garlands of different flowers, how can he endure the weight of his matted locks? He, who should have acquired merit by the performance of sacrifices aided by the rishis, to-day increases his meritorious deeds by the practice of austerity. Now is the countenance of my elder brother, formerly adorned with sandal paste, covered with dust! Alas! it is on my account that Shri Rama, who formerly enjoyed every delight, is to-day undergoing this distress. Woe unto me, who am abhored by all."

Thus lamenting, the wretched Bharata, his face bedewed with tears, sought to run and fall at the feet of Rama, but sank unconscious on the way. Deeply afflicted, that great hero, Prince Bharata, cried out: "O Excellent One," and uttered no more. Exclaiming only, "O Noble Sire", he could proceed no further. Shatrughna, also weeping, embraced the feet of

Shri Rama, on which Rama gathering them both in his arms, melted into tears.

Then Sumantra and Guha approached Shri Rama and Lakshmana, and it appeared as if the Sun and Moon, Jupiter and Venus had conjoined in the heavens. The inhabitants of the forest, beholding the four princes met together in their midst, shed tears of joy.

CHAPTER 100

Shri Rama enquires of Prince Bharata concerning the discharge of his royal duties

SHRI RAMACHANDRA saw Bharata lying on the ground, clothed in ascetic's garb, his hair coiled on the crown of his head, his palms joined in supplication, resembling the sun bereft of splendour, fallen to earth, at the time of the dissolution of the world.

Taking hold of the hands of his brother, who was emaciated and weak, Shri Rama raised him up and smelling his head, embraced him, clasping him in his arms and tenderly enquiring of him: " O Child, where is thy father, that thou art come to the forest alone? Had he lived, thou couldst not have come hither unaccompanied! Alas! I grieve that I scarcely recognize my brother, thin, weary and full of care. What brings thee to the forest? O My Brother, is the king well and happy? Or has grief brought about his end? O Darling, thou art yet a child, tell me, is ought amiss in that eternal kingdom? O Hero of Truth, hast thou served the king well? Say, is that Sovereign of men, devoted to truth and to duty, the performer of the great sacrifice, in good health? Is that highly learned monarch, master of the ascetic brahmins, fully cherished? O Child, are Mother Kaushalya and Queen Sumitra, mother of an illustrious son, well? Is that highly exalted Queen Kaushàlya, happy? O Friend, dost thou sufficiently regard that humble, experienced, highborn,

magnanimous companion of mine, he who is skilled in action, the son of Shri Vasishtha? Does the royal priest, highly versed in the Veda, who is wise and beneficent, inform thee of the time of sacrifice? O Brother, dost thou offer full reverence to the Gods, father, mother, Guru, thine elders, the physicians and brahmins? O Friend, dost thou give due respect and honour to Sudhama, skilled in the science of arms and conversant with the mantra-driven weapons? Hast thou made those thy counsellors, who are trustworthy, patient, masters of ethics and who have transcended avarice? O Prince, the good fortune of kings is secret consultation with those versed in the spiritual laws. My Son, hast thou overcome sleep? Dost thou awaken betimes? Dost thou in the late hours meditate on the methods of acquiring legitimate wealth? Dost thou reflect alone on matters of moment and consult with thy ministers in public? Do other monarchs know of thy decisions before they are applied? When thou hast determined upon what must and should be done, dost thou speedily accomplish it? Are lesser kings acquainted with thy determined resolve after the event or before thou hast set it in motion? Dost thou prefer the society and advice of a learned pundit to that of countless fools? In times of adversity, it is of infinite advantage to have the proximity of a learned man. If a sovereign surround himself with ten thousand ignorant persons, he will receive no help from them, but should a king be attended by a wise minister, thoughtful, studious, versed in the moral laws and government, he will reap a great advantage. O Brother, dost thou employ men of exalted character in affairs of moment and lesser ones in unimportant events? Dost thou appoint ministers who are pure of heart, full of integrity and of a noble disposition, whose ancestors have served the crown in positions of authority? O Son of Queen Kaikeyi, do the arrogant and proud, when incensed, offer thee or thy ministers insult? As a woman disregards one who has illicit connection with another's wife or the priests condemn that man who has sinned while offering the sacrifice, so is a king despised who levies harsh taxes. That monarch who does not condemn a man to death, who has through avarice and deluded by ambition, accused others who are virtuous, and even threatened the life of the king, is himself

destroyed! O Brother, art thou attended by such persons? Has a commander-in-chief who is active, victorious over his enemies, skilled in arms, patient in adversity, devoted to thee and experienced, been appointed by thee? Hast thou honoured with suitable rewards, those men who are valiant, distinguished, eminent in military sciences, resourceful and whose abilities have been tested? Dost thou distribute remuneration and provisions in a fitting manner when they are due? Servants who are not paid at the proper season, become incensed and disregard their master. Dissatisfied retainers are a source of danger.

"Are the liege warriors and chieftains devoted to thee? In time of need, are they ready to lay down their lives for thy sake? Hast thou appointed, as thine ambassadors, those who are citizens of thy kingdom, who can divine the motives of others, who are of sound judgment, eloquent, and able to overcome their opponents in debate? Dost thou employ three spies, each unacquainted with the other to master the secrets of the fifteen,[1] excluding thy ministers, priests and the heir-apparent? Dost thou set a watch over enemies whom thou hast driven from thy kingdom and yet who have returned? Dost thou deem them harmless? Art thou attended by brahmins of atheistic opinions? Such persons deem themselves wise but, in fact, are fools, yet they may divert others from the path of virtue, being skilled in dispatching souls to the lower regions. They do not study the authorised treatises on the duties of men, but indulge in arguments against the Veda and becoming eminent in useless knowledge, discuss unworthy matters continually.

" O Friend, dost thou carefully preserve the capital Ayodhya, the seat of our ancestors and great men, justly termed 'Invincible' having strong gates and being filled with elephants, horses and chariots, where brahmins engaged in spiritual duties dwell, also warriors and merchants, and superior men who have subdued their senses and are intent on various enterprises; that progressive city which is replete with temples of many

[1] The fifteen are: chamberlains, adjutants, treasurers, master of the rolls, commanders-in-chief, police chiefs, lawyers, magistrates, keepers of the forests and mountains, almoners, gaolers, doorkeepers, superintendents of public works, priests and paymasters.

forms, frequented by learned men. O Brother, ours is a capital which has been the site of many great sacrifices, which contains innumerable temples and lakes, frequented by cheerful men and women, where festive assemblies are held, where no portion of the earth is uncultivated, where elephants, horses and cattle dwell in large numbers, where no one lives in jeopardy, and which is irrigated by artificial means so that people need not depend solely on rain ; which is delightful and where no dangerous beasts like lions abound, which is free from wicked men, which improves daily and which is protected by the spirits of our ancestors, tell me is that city prosperous ? O Brother, art thou satisfied with the husbandmen and those who live by tending their cattle ? Dost thou provide what they need and preserve them from harm ? Dost thou ever guard them and provide them with sustenance ? O Brother, a king should ever protect his subjects by righteous means. Dost thou propitiate the women of thy realm ? Are they duly safeguarded by thee ? Dost thou put thy confidence in them ? Dost thou communicate thy secrets to them ? O Prince, dost thou, well adorned, show thyself to thy people in the assembly hall 'ere noon ? Do those who work for thee approach thee with assurance, or do they hold back on account of fear ? Both these states are unprofitable. Dost thou treat thy subjects with moderation ? Are thy forts well supplied with wealth, food, arms, water, armaments, and furnished with archers and bowmen ? O Prince, does thy treasury contain more than is needed for thine expenditure ? Is thy wealth spent unprofitably on musicians and dancers ? Is a part of thy treasure devoted to the gods, thy sisters, the brahmins, the uninvited guests, warriors and friends ? Dost thou condemn any through avarice, without regard for justice or subjecting the offender to closer examination by those eminent in law and who are of good conduct ? Are those who serve thee, just men, innocent of lying and theft, and not of ill-repute ? O Noble One, those who are apprehended for theft, caught in the act and their guilt established on due examination, are they able to obtain release by bribing the officials ? In a dispute between a rich and a poor man, do thy experienced judges carry out justice uninfluenced by a desire for gain ? O Prince of Raghu, the tears of those who are unjustly condemned

by a monarch who lives at ease and is indifferent to justice being meted out, destroy his children and his herds ! O Prince, dost thou satisfy the aged, children and physicians by providing them with their needs, treating them with affection and granting them the benefits of wise administration ? Dost thou offer salutations on meeting thy Guru or the aged, the ascetics, strangers, sacred objects, and the brahmins who are learned and enlightened ? Dost thou use the time reserved for the performance of thy duty, for the acquisition of wealth, or dost thou waste the opportunity of fulfilling thy duty and acquiring wealth by partiality to comfort and dissipation ? O Chief of Conquerors, O Knower of the significance of time, dost thou divide thine hours between the observance of thy duty, the acquisition of wealth and legitimate diversion ? O Wise One, do the learned pundits and the citizens pray daily for thy welfare ? O Bharata, dost thou abjure the fourteen failings a sovereign must eschew ? Atheism, dissimulation, anger, inattention, procrastination, neglect of the wise, indolence, surrender of the senses to external objects, disregard of counsel, consulting those who advocate evil, the deferring of that which has been resolved upon, the concealment of counsel received, the abandoning of righteous conduct, the offering of respect equally to the low and high born, and the ruthless conquest of other lands.

" O King, art thou acquainted with the results of the following and dost thou constantly reflect on them ? Hunting, gambling, sleeping during the day, slander, inordinate affection, vanity, concentration on dancing and music, lounging here and there to no purpose ; the five fortifications ; by moat, by high banks, by thickly planted trees, by waste land destitute of means of subsistence and by a waterless region ; the four means to success ; concluding peace, liberality, punishment and sowing dissension in the ranks of the enemy ; the seven requisites of administration : the king, the ministers, government, treasury, territory, army and allies. The kinds of persons with whom one should not contract friendship ; those who speak ill of others, the bold, the curious, the injurious, those who take other's property, the abusive, the ruthless, and the eight objects which should be pursued ; righteousness, acquisition of legitimate

wealth, suitable diversions, the study of the three Vedas, treaty, stratagem, invasion, proper timing, and allying oneself with the powerful?

"Art thou acquainted with the five kinds of suffering caused by celestial beings; by fire, water, disease, famine and plague? Hast thou carefully considered the misfortunes occasioned by officials, thieves, enemies and the king's favourites? Dost thou reflect that it is not proper to be intimate with a child, one who is senile, one who has long been afflicted, one who has been excommunicated, a coward, a terrorist, one who is avaricious or who excites covetousness, one who is despised by others, one who is voluptuous, one who consults everybody, one who speaks ill of the brahmins, one who ascribes all to fate, or who is afflicted by famine, or who wanders from country to country without a purpose, one who has many adversaries, one who does not act at the proper season, one who is not devoted to truth, one who lives under foreign domination and one who is aggressive? Hast thou given the following due consideration and found them to be in accord with thee: thy subjects, women, the kingdom, those who have lost their wealth, thine enemy, thy friend, those unfriendly to thine enemy?

"O Wise One, art thou acquainted with the preparations necessary for a journey, the methods of punishment, the drawing up of treaties, and who is to be trusted or distrusted? O Prince, dost thou enter into consultation with thy counsellors collectively or separately, and dost thou treat each interview as private? Dost thou conclude thy study of the Veda with charitable gifts? Dost thou employ thy wealth in distribution of alms and legitimate diversions? Do thy marriages become fruitful of progeny? Dost thou practise what thou hast learned from the scriptures? Dost thou approve of acts of benevolence, duty, and worship and regard them as productive of fame and longevity? O Prince, dost thou follow the path of thy predecessors, which promotes happiness and which all applaud? O Bharata, dost thou partake of delicious dishes by thyself? When amongst thy companions, dost thou first present them with succulent food and then partake of it thyself? Know, O Brother, that monarch who is acquainted with the law and also knows how

to administer justice and rules by righteous means, becomes Lord of the earth and enters heaven on his death."

CHAPTER 101

Shri Rama hears the account of his father's death

BHARATA, hearing these words of Rama, replied: "What will the discharge of royal duties avail me, who am destitute of all virtue? O Great One, according to the tradition of our line, the younger brother may not be king while the elder lives, therefore, O Raghava, return with me to the auspicious city of Ayodhya and for the sake of our family, cause thyself to be installed as king. Some may consider the king a man, but I hold him to be a god, since his conduct differs from others, being inspired by duty and divine grace. When I was at the home of my maternal uncle and thou exiled to the forest, King Dasaratha, adored by the good, the performer of spiritual sacrifices, departed to heaven. As soon as thou, with Sita and Lakshmana, hadst left the capital, the king overwhelmed by sorrow and affliction, passed away. O Chief of Men, offer the traditional libations for thy father; Shatrughna and I have already carried out this ritual. O Prince, it is said that the water and rice offered by a beloved son, grants imperishable bliss to one departed. O Raghava, thou wast indeed the beloved of thy royal father; through grief on thy account and the desire to see thee, thy sire, his mind unceasingly fixed on thee, overcome by sorrow, departed to heaven."

CHAPTER 102

They are all afflicted with grief

ON hearing the account of his father's death, from his brother, Shri Rama fell unconscious.

Bharata's words proved as dreadful to Shri Rama, as the mace of Indra falling on the danavas in battle. Wringing his hands, Raghava fell to the earth like a tree severed by an axe. The Lord of the World, Shri Rama, fallen on the earth, lay like an elephant which, having borne away the river bank, sinks under the load. His two brothers together with Sita, perceiving him to have fallen in a swoon, sprinkled him with water in order to restore him.

Recovering somewhat, Shri Rama began to lament. The virtuous prince, conscious that his sire had passed away, uttered these pious words to Bharata: "What should I do in Ayodhya now my father has departed to heaven? Who can preserve the capital bereft of this illustrious monarch? What can I, worthless and wretched, do for that magnanimous one, my father, who died through grief at my separation and whose funeral rites I was not able to perform? O Sinless Bharata, thou indeed art blessed, by whom the last rites of thy warrior parent were performed. Now when I return to the capital after completing the term of my exile, none will instruct me in what is good and what is evil. Formerly, in affection, my father being pleased with my good conduct, enlightened me. Who will now utter those words which fell pleasingly on my ears?"

Turning his face towards Sita whose countenance resembled the full moon, Rama thus addressed her: "O Sita, thy father-in-law has left this life, O Lakshmana, thou art fatherless! Bharata has related this bitter news to us. O Lakshmana, bring the pulp of the Ingudi fruit and change this apparel of bark. I desire to offer libations of water to my royal sire. Let Sita precede me and thou follow her; on such occasions, this procedure must be observed."[1] Then Sumantra, the aged

[1] When they descend into the water the order of the procession is that the children go first according to age, then the women, then the men, the youngest first, the eldest last. The order is reversed when they emerge.

retainer of the royal line, wise, intelligent, tender-hearted, self-subdued, and humble, wholly devoted to Rama, comforted the princes and led them to the river Mandakini whose waters were sacred and meritorious.

Deeply afflicted, the illustrious ones approached the pleasant river that passed through blossoming woods, and descending into the pure, swift-flowing and un-muddied stream, they offered the ritual water in the name of their royal father, saying: "O Great King, may this water be thine." Then Shri Rama, filling his palms with water, turning to the south, wept and said: "O Mighty King, may this sacred water offered to-day by me, be thine for ever in the region of thine ancestors."

Thereafter, Raghava with his brothers offered balls of rice in memory of the king on the shores of the river Mandakini. Having made a cake by mixing the juice of berries with the pulp of the Ingudi fruit, Shri Rama spread it on kusha grass and deeply afflicted, weeping, said: "O Mighty King, be pleased to accept and partake of this food, for that which is man's customary food, the gods approve."

Then ascending the hillside, Shri Rama returned by the way he had come. The great Raghava, reaching the door of the thatched hut, took hold of the hands of Lakshmana and Bharata, and wept. The sound of the weeping of the four princes and Sita re-echoed in the mountains like the roaring of a lion, and the army hearing it were greatly perturbed and said among themselves, "Shri Rama and Bharata have met and they are bewailing the death of the king, their sire."

Leaving their camp and turning their faces to where the sound of weeping arose, they went in haste to that spot. Some mounted horses and elephants, some rode in gilded chariots, and others on foot hastened towards that place, for though Shri Rama had but lately left the capital, it appeared to them as if he had been long absent from them. Desirous of seeing Rama, they proceeded to the hermitage of the illustrious prince in various kinds of vehicles and the sound of their advance and the rolling wheels created a noise like thunder. Elephants terrified by the tumult ran with their mates into other woods, perfuming the forest with their ichor. Boars, wolves, buffaloes, snakes, tigers, wild cattle and deer of many kinds were filled

with fear. Ducks, waterfowl, swans, geese, cuckoos and herons fled in every direction. The air was filled with birds, and the earth with men, rendering both beautiful.

At length, the army reached the place where they perceived the illustrious and innocent Rama, the chief of men, seated on the sacrificial seat, and seeing his condition they began to curse Kaikeyi and Manthara and, approaching closer, wept bitterly. Shri Rama, observing them so afflicted, embraced them like a parent. Embracing those who were worthy of his affection, offering salutations to some, he treated those of his age and his relatives with the respect due to each.

The voice of their weeping filled the earth and sky, and reverberated in the caves and in every quarter like the beat of a drum.

CHAPTER 103

Shri Rama greets the queens

SHRI VASISHTHA, preceded by the widowed queens of King Dasaratha, proceeding towards Shri Rama's hermitage, beheld the slow-moving Mandakini and the holy place frequented by Rama. Afflicted with grief, Queen Kaushalya wept and then said to Sumitra and the other Queens: " O see! here is the place where the defenceless Rama, Lakshmana and Sita, deprived by Kaikeyi of their kingdom, come to bathe. O Sumitra, here meseems thy son Lakshmana unwearyingly brings water for my son. Though engaged in this menial service, a kind office performed for an elder brother is an honourable act! Though the carrying of water is a humble occupation, when Shri Ramachandra, persuaded by Bharata, returns to the capital, then thy son, worthy of every comfort, will abandon these laborious duties."

Queen Kaushalya of large eyes, now perceived the funeral cake offered by Shri Rama in memory of his father. She beheld how the sorrow-stricken Rama had laid the flour ball on the ground in his great sire's remembrance, and she then addressed

the widows of the departed king, saying: "See how this has been offered by Raghava in memory of the great king of the House of Ikshwaku. I do not consider this flour ball mixed with the juice of the Ingudi fruit to be worthy of the Mahatma Dasaratha, who was equal to a god! How should the sovereign of the earth enclosed between the four seas, find this cake of Ingudi pulp acceptable? Nothing is more painful to me than this, that the illustrious Rama should offer this paltry flour ball to his deceased father! Why does my heart not break into a thousand fragments, seeing this poor offering? It is a common saying among men that the food eaten by a man is the food of his god and his ancestors."

The consorts of the king consoled the chief queen and proceeding onwards, reached the hermitage where they beheld Shri Rama seated like a god descended from heaven. Seeing Shri Rama withdrawn from every pleasure, they were deeply distressed and wept bitterly.

Shri Rama, the Devotee of Truth, rose up and touched the feet of his mothers, and the large-eyed queens with their tender hands took the dust from his feet. Shri Lakshmana, distressed to see their grief, offered salutations to them with deep affection and they, wiping the dust from the feet of Shri Rama, manifested the same love to Prince Lakshmana, since he, too, was the son of King Dasaratha. Sita also, full of grief, her eyes suffused with tears, stood before the queens touching their feet.

Kaushalya, embracing Shri Sita who was emaciated through the privations of her exile, addressed her as a mother her daughter and said: "Alas! Alas! the daughter of King Videha, the daughter-in-law of King Dasaratha, and the consort of Shri Ramachandra, has undergone great privations in the forest. O Janaki, I burn with the fire of grief when I behold thy countenance scorched by the sun like the faded crimson water lilies, or gold defiled with dust, or the moon obscured by clouds. I am being consumed by the pain arising from this, like a piece of wood[1] slowly consumed by fire."

While Queen Kaushalya was thus lamenting, Shri Ramachandra approached the Holy Vasishtha and touched his lotus

[1] Videha is the name given to the two pieces of wood from which a fire is kindled. There is, therefore, a play on the name of Sita, here.

feet. Having touched the feet of the great ascetic, who was as resplendent as fire, like Indra offering salutations to the feet of Brihaspati, Shri Rama sat down near him.

Then the pious Bharata accompanied by his counsellors, the chief people of the city, and his generals, approached Shri Rama and occupied a lower seat.

The heroic Bharata, with joined palms, seated by his elder brother who was attired in ascetic's garb, appeared like Prajapati seated before Brahma! At that moment, the principal citizens present were filled with curiosity to know what Shri Bharata would say to Raghava. The ever-truthful and valiant Rama, seated with Bharata and Lakshmana, together resembled three ritual fires in the place of sacrifice.

CHAPTER 104

He requests Prince Bharata to ascend the throne

SHRI RAMA, together with Lakshmana, addressed Shri Bharata, saying: " O Bharata, say why thou art come hither to the forest in ascetic's garb, clothed in bark and deerskin? For what purpose, O Prince, hast thou, abandoning thy throne, come to the forest, attired in the skin of the antelope? "

Thus questioned, Shri Bharata controlling his grief, answered: " O Noble Sire, my father, the king, by my mother acting in an improper manner, has died of grief through separation from his son. O Mighty Prince, my mother has done an exceedingly evil deed and forfeited her fair name. Widowed and overwhelmed with affliction, she will fall into hell. Though the son of Kaikeyi, yet am I thy servant. Be gracious to me and allow thyself to be installed to-day and ascend the throne like Indra. The elders of the people and my widowed mother have come hither to entreat thee. Be pleased to grant our request, O Lord.

" O Thou who payest due deference to all men, being the eldest son of the king, shouldst by right occupy the throne.

Accept the burden of kingship and gratify the desire of thy friends. The earth, obtaining thee as her Lord, will rest satisfied as the winter night in the presence of the moon. Not only am I thy brother, but thy devoted follower and servant. I and my ministers salute thee and beg of thee to look with favour on our request.

" O Chief of Men, let not these counsellors and those who have traditionally held office, plead in vain."

Having spoken, Prince Bharata, his eyes suffused with tears, placed his head at the feet of Shri Rama. Shri Rama lifting him up embraced Prince Bharata who was sighing like one distraught, and said : " O Bharata, why should a virtuous and enlightened prince such as thou, act so that his elder brother commit sin ? O Hero, I see no fault in thee, but it behoves thee not to speak ill of thy mother. O Sinless One, the father or the spiritual preceptor can order his disciple, his servant or his wife as he will. Therefore, it must be known to thee, that a wise son or devotee should ever manifest obedience. I am, therefore, submissive to my sire.

" O Lovely One, we are subject to the king and it is one if he send us to the forest, to the abode of ascetics, or retain us in his proximity. O Chief of the Virtuous, a mother should be revered even as the father. O Bharata, by the command of my pious mother and father, I was sent to the forest, how should I dare to disobey them ?

" Do thou, O Prince, return to the capital and acclaimed by the people, ascend the throne, while I reside in the forest as an ascetic. Remember, thus did the king resolve in the presence of his people and now he has departed. The sovereign is the instructor of his people and of thee also, and it was meet he should do as he has done. O Bharata, do thou enjoy the kingdom given thee by my father.

" O Beautiful One, I shall remain in the Dandaka forest for fourteen years and enjoy what my father has conferred on me. The illustrious monarch, my sire, honoured by the whole world, has commanded me to come to the forest and to obey him is my happiness.

" Meseems the sovereignty of the whole world is vain if it be mine in defiance of my father's command."

CHAPTER 105

Prince Bharata appeals to Shri Rama to return and rule the kingdom

THE princes surrounded by relatives and friends passed the night sorrowing. The day having dawned, the brothers observed the fire sacrifice and performed the repetition of silent prayer on the banks of the river Mandakini, then entering the hermitage of Rama, they sat in profound silence, no one uttering a word, a great peace prevailing over all.

At length, Shri Bharata, in the midst of his friends, broke the silence and thus addressed Shri Rama : " O My Brother, our illustrious sovereign conferred the kingdom on me to satisfy my mother and fulfil the obligation of his former boons and my mother having given this kingdom to me, I now offer it to thee, enjoy it without hindrance. When the dam bursts in the rainy season, none can stem the tide, similarly none but thee can protect this vast dominion. O King, as an ass cannot equal the pace of a horse, nor an ordinary bird's flight that of an eagle, so am I unable to rule the kingdom without thee.

" O Rama, happy is the sovereign on whom others depend, but wretched is the one who depends on others. A tree planted and watered, though it grow and spread forth great branches that no dwarf can scale, and be covered with blossom, if it bear no fruit, the one who planted it suffers obloquy. O Mighty Hero, let this metaphor be understood by thee, that thou, being the Lord of all, mayst guide thy servants. O Lord, let us behold thee, the destroyer of thy foes, seated on the royal throne, shining resplendent like the sun. May these mighty tuskers follow thy chariot and all the queens dwelling in the palace rejoice."

The people hearing Shri Bharata's words applauded them saying, " Well said ! " " Well said ! "

Then the compassionate Rama perceiving Bharata afflicted and lamenting, consoled him saying : " O Bharata, man is not free, time[1] drags him hither and thither. All objects perish, all individualised souls must depart when their merit is exhausted ;

[1] Time is the form of destiny.

sons, friends, wives, all who live must die one day. Hoarding and spending, prosperity and destitution, meeting and parting, life and death are all akin. When the ripe fruit falls, we are not surprised, thus a man being born should not fear when death claims him.

"As a building supported by stout pillars on becoming old, falls into ruins, so man subject to age, must one day meet with dissolution. O Bharata, the night once past, does not come again ; so the waters of the Yamuna, flowing to the sea, do not return. See ! the days and nights are passing away, decreasing the period of our life's span, as the rays of the sun in summer suck up the earth's moisture. O Prince, grieve for thyself therefore, there is nought else worthy of grief ! Age withers all whether movable or immovable. Death is ever at our side, nor does it leave us when we travel to a distant place, and it is still present at our returning !

" What shall a man do when his skin is wrinkled and grey hair covers his head and he is stricken in years ? Man rejoices when the sun rises and sets, heedless of the waning of his powers. He welcomes the approach of each season, such as the arrival of spring, yet the succession of the seasons devours man's days ! As pieces of driftwood, floating on the sea, come together for a space, so wives, sons, relatives, wealth and property remain with us a while, but in the course of time, leave us.

" One, sitting by the wayside, cries to a group of travellers passing by, ' Let me also go with you ! ' why then should man grieve to tread the road, which has been trodden by his predecessors ? The life of man, like a river flowing, does not return, thus our days diminish and we should perform those righteous acts that bring us to the knowledge of Reality.

" Practising virtue, man should enjoy worldly pleasures ; our father, the illustrious Dasaratha, having performed benevolent deeds and given fitting charitable gifts, has departed, clothed in virtue. Having cherished his servants and nourished his people, having levied those taxes alone warranted by moral duty, having set up water tanks and created reservoirs and performed many sacrificial acts, he has passed away. Leaving the world after enjoying a variety of pleasures and offering countless sacrifices, the king, at a great age, has gone to heaven.

" O Brother, it is not meet to grieve for the king, who, full of years, having enjoyed the pleasures of the world, respected by the good, has given up his life. Having abandoned his worn-out frame, he has obtained the form of a celestial being.

"A wise, learned and enlightened man like thee, should not grieve for such a sire. Exercising patience, thou shouldst cease to lament and giving up sorrow return to the capital. O Chief among the Eloquent, thy father has commanded thee to dwell in Ayodhya. I too will perform the behests of him who ever practised righteousness !

" I cannot disregard the commands of my illustrious father, he is worthy to be obeyed by thee and me, being our parent and our ruler. O Son of Raghu, I shall, therefore, obey his will and dwell in the forest. O Chief of Men, those who desire felicity in a future state, and who are virtuous and benevolent should obey their elders. O Great One, bear in mind the behests of our father, a lover of truth, and return to the capital to rule over the kingdom ! "

The magnanimous Rama, having uttered these sage words relative to the need for obedience to his father, became silent.

CHAPTER 106

In spite of the entreaties exhorting him to return, Shri Rama remains steadfast in his vow

RAMA, the lover of his people, having spoken, ceased ; then the pious Bharata answered Rama, putting forth persuasive arguments of righteous purport, saying : " O Lord, who is there in this world like thee ? Adversity does not move thee, nor does any agreeable thing touch thee. All look on thee as their superior, yet thou seekest counsel of thine elders !

" The man to whom the living and dead are one and who is indifferent as to what he possesses or loses, for what reason should he grieve ? O Lord, those who like thee, know, as thou dost, what is the nature of the soul and its essence, are not moved in the hour of distress !

"O Prince of Raghu, like the gods, thou art magnanimous, thou art ever forbearing and faithful to thy vows. Thou art wise, thou knowest and seest all! Thou art aware of the motives of men's actions and the cause of their abandoning them, therefore, that distress which is insupportable to others, does not, in any wise, disturb thee."

Having spoken thus, Bharata continued: "O Rama, be gracious to me, though during my absence in a strange land, my mother committed those sins which cause my affliction. I am bound by the ties of duty, else would I have slain my wicked mother. What is evil and what is good is known to me, descended as I am from the righteous King Dasaratha, therefore I am unable to act contrary to virtue. I cannot speak evil in the assembly of my pious and aged father, who has passed away, and where is a man to be found so wholly acquainted with the law of righteousness as was the king, yet what person familiar with the moral law, would commit so great a wrong prompted by the desire to please a woman? There is an ancient saying that, at the approach of death, man loses the power of judgment! The king has verily justified this adage to the whole world! Through fear of Queen Kaikeyi's wrath or her threat of self-imposed destruction, or through mental agitation, the king may have acted thus without consulting his subjects, but thou art not bound by such a deed. He who imputes the transgressions of his father to righteous motives is not considered a good son; as heir to the king, reveal not the errors of thy sire, but conceal this unjust deed from the world.

"O Hero, it is thy duty to save my mother Kaikeyi, my father, my relatives and myself from the consequcnces of this action condemned by all. O Brother, remember thy duty as a warrior and reflect on the outcome of thy sojourn in the forest as an ascetic, but do thou also consider the good of thy people. It becomes thee not to undertake this course of action. The first duty of a warrior is to be installed so that he may be able to protect his people. Say, why should a man giving up that which is an established duty, embrace that which is wretched, cheerless, visionary and undefined? If, O Blessed One, thou desirest to undertake this mortification, why dost thou not seek it through the arduous labour of ruling the four castes? It is said that

the duty of the householder is the highest dharma, then, why dost thou abandon it?

"O Lord, hear me; I am but thy child in respect of learning, age and state, how should I be able to govern the kingdom? I, a child, void of understanding and virtue and in rank also thine inferior; how should I be able to live without thee much less rule in thy stead? Therefore, O Raghava, O Thou Virtuous One, do thou, with thy relatives govern the kingdom without opposition and acquire merit! The great sage, the Holy Vasishtha, is here present with the ministers and priests, permit thyself to be crowned and return with us to Ayodhya!

"As Indra, having conquered his foes, entered heaven attended by the Maruts, do thou enter Ayodhya, thereby discharging thy duties to the gods, the sages, and thine ancestors, gratifying the ambitions of thy friends! Regard me as thy servant and command me! O Noble One, let thy friends to-day rejoice at thine enthronement and let the evil doers flee to the uttermost ends of the earth! O Chief of Men, wash away the taint of my mother's guilt and deliver our great parent from this heinous sin. With my head bent in submission, I entreat thee; as Shri Vishnu shows his compassion to all beings, do thou show mercy to us. Shouldst thou however reject my prayer and go hence to some other forest, then will I follow thee there!"

Shri Rama, thus entreated by Shri Bharata, who had placed his head at the feet of his brother in humility, still remained steadfast in his vow and did not waver or consent to return to Ayodhya. Beholding the constancy of Shri Rama, all present rejoiced to see him so faithful to his vow, yet bewailed his determination not to return to the capital.

The merchants, the learned brahmins and the priests filled with wonder, and the weeping matrons, praised Bharata and unitedly entreated Rama to return.

CHAPTER 107

He instructs Prince Bharata to return and be installed

SHRI RAMA, worshipped by Bharata, who sought to petition him further, replied to his younger brother in the presence of the other warriors, saying: "O Bharata, Son of Queen Kaikeyi, and the mighty Dasaratha, what thou hast said is meet and right. In ancient times when King Dasaratha, our sire, sought thy mother, Princess Kaikeyi, in marriage, he promised her father that he would be succeeded by a son of hers. Furthermore, in the war between the gods and asuras, our sovereign made the promise of two boons to thy mother in return for her great services, in consequence of which thy illustrious and charming mother asked two favours of the king, holding him to his word.

"O Lion among Men! By one boon was my exile secured and by the other the kingdom was obtained for thee. O Chief of men, as a result of the boon granted by my father, I have consented to live in the forest for fourteen years.

"Determined to prove the truth of my father's word, I have entered the forest with Sita and Lakshmana, regardless of heat and cold. O Great Ruler, it becomes thee also to prove thy father to be a votary of truth and allow thyself to be speedily installed. O Bharata, honour this debt, thou owest it to the king, and thus protect his fair name. By occupying the throne, shalt thou succeed in pleasing me and rejoicing thy mother, Queen Kaikeyi.

"O Friend, I have heard that formerly a great monarch named Gaya, when offering a sacrifice at Gaya, to the spirit of his ancestors, said: 'A son is called "Puttra" because he saves his father from hell and protects the spirits of his ancestors by enjoined acts of benevolence.'

"To have many learned and virtuous sons is greatly to be desired, for some of them may offer a sacrifice at Gaya and thus deliver the spirits of their ancestors.

"O Son of Raghu, all the royal sages have approved this tenet, thou shouldst also, therefore, accept it. O Bharata, do thou

return to Ayodhya with Shatrughna and thy people and promote the happiness of thy subjects there.

"O King, I shall speedily retire to the Dandaka forest with Sita and Lakshmana. O Bharata, be thou king of men and I will be sovereign over the wild beasts. Do thou return joyfully to the capital and I will cheerfully proceed to the forest.

"May the royal canopy protect thee from the sun's heat, I shall seek shelter from its rays in the dense shadows of the trees. O Bharata, Shatrughna of limitless understanding shall attend thee, and I shall be attended by the illustrious Prince Lakshmana. O Brother, do not be a prey to grief any longer, thus shall we, the four sons of the great King Dasaratha, establish his fame in the realm of truth."

CHAPTER 108

A brahmin utters words contrary to dharma

As Shri Rama thus instructed Bharata, a brahmin named Javali uttered these words contrary to dharma: "Well-spoken, O Raghava, but it is not for thee to think as common men, for thou art a man of understanding and also a philosopher. Consider well, O Prince, a man has neither a real friend nor an enemy, he enters the world alone and leaves it alone also. He who thinks 'This is my father' or 'This is my mother' and becomes attached to this relationship is without sense. From the standpoint of right reasoning, none belongs to any. As a man travelling from his own village to another, remains for the night somewhere on the way and leaves at dawn, so father, mother, wealth and family remain with a man for a brief space and the wise do not become attached to them.

"O Chief of Men, thou dost not, being youthful, merit the path of suffering set with thorns; it ill becomes thee to abandon thy father's kingdom. Return to Ayodhya and rule over that prosperous land. The goddess protecting Ayodhya, devoted to thee, awaits thy return. O Prince, enjoy those chosen

pleasures which befit a king and divert thyself in the capital as Indra in Amaravati. Dasaratha is nought to thee nor thou to him, the king is one person and thou another, therefore, follow the advice I give thee.

"The father's seed is but the remote cause of man's birth, since if it does not enter the mother's womb, it cannot fructify; the true source of conception is the womb of the mother. The king has departed to the place destined for all mortals. Why dost thou claim this false relationship and distress thyself in vain, O Rama? I grieve for those who, abandoning the pleasures of the world, seek to acquire merit for felicity hereafter and sink to an untimely death, I do not grieve for others. Men waste food and other precious things by offering them up yearly, as sacrifices in honour of their departed ancestors. O Rama, has a dead man ever partaken of food? If food that is eaten by one, nourishes another, then those who journey need never carry provision on the way. Relatives might feed a brahmin, in his name, at home!

"O Ramachandra, these scriptural injunctions were laid down by learned men, skilled in inducing others to give, and finding other means of obtaining wealth, thus subjugating the simple-minded. Their doctrine is 'Sacrifice, give in charity, consecrate yourselves, undergo austerities and become ascetics'. O Rama, be wise, there exists no world but this, that is certain! Enjoy that which is present and cast behind thee that which is unpleasant! Adopting the principle acceptable to all, do thou receive the kingdom offered thee by Bharata."

CHAPTER 109

Shri Rama replies in words based on the Vedas

SHRI RAMA, patiently giving ear to the utterance of Javali, replied with a due sense of judgment and in words based on his belief that those duties enjoined in the Vedas, should be fulfilled. "O Muni, that which thou hast spoken with the desire to

please me, is not authorized, nor are thy admonitions just, since even the most cursory analysis proves them to be false. O Sage, in the assembly of the good, men who are not self-subdued and who are wanting in integrity and those who act contrary to what is ordered by the scriptures, are not honoured. It is his conduct that renders man virtuous, a coward or a hero and transmutes impurity to purity. Should I embrace error and abandon the authority of my elders, relinquishing rectitude and honour, as also moral conduct and the Vedic ordinance, then I, conforming to thy beliefs and sacrificing prudence, would forfeit the respect of wise and virtuous men.

" Following thy counsel, were I to cease to pursue the way of truth and tread the lower path, by what means should I attain heaven ? Were I to depart from the moral code, then every man might act according to his inclination, since the subject mirrors the king, in action.

"Above all, a sovereign should manifest probity, benevolence, his chief duty being to uphold truth ; truth is verily the kingdom, by truth is the world supported.

" The gods and sages esteem truth as the highest principle. He who utters truth attains the supreme state. Men fear a liar as they do a venomous serpent, truth is the root of all felicity and the support not only of this world, but the best means of attaining heaven !

" Whatever is offered in sacrifice, whatever austerity is undertaken has its foundation in truth, so the Vedas declare, hence truth is the most sacred of all things.

" One maintains a family, another governs the whole world, another falls into hell, another attains heaven in accordance with the fruit of his actions ! Acquainted with the law of Karma founded on truth, ought I not to prove my sire a devotee of that truth ? Why should not I, who have pledged my word, follow that which I have accepted as truth ? Honouring my father's vow, I shall never abandon the way of truth either for the sake of governing a kingdom or through being misled by others or through ignorance or anger. Hast thou not heard that neither the Gods nor the ancestors receive the offerings of one who is irresolute, infirm of purpose and false to his word ?

" I hold truth as the supreme virtue of mankind. I desire

to reverence that truth upheld by men of old. Should I follow the duty of a warrior, I should be unjust. To do that which is false is worthy only of mean, covetous and depraved souls. Should I pursue that crooked path, indicated by thee, then I should perpetrate falsehood, through the mind, the body and the soul. Those who uphold truth acquire land, renown, fame, and heaven also; therefore, let all men utter truth and act according to truth!

"That which thou, after much deliberation, believest to be true, and recommendest to me is wholly improper. O how can I disregard the command of my sire, that I should reside in the forest? When I pledged my word in the presence of my father, to enter the forest, Queen Kaikeyi was rendered glad at heart, how should I now give her cause for distress?

"Giving up falsehood and deceit, differentiating between what should and should not be done, subduing the senses, possessed of full faith in the Vedic injunctions, I shall devote myself to the fulfilment of my father's will!

"By sacrifice, one acquires the state of Indra and enters heaven. The sages by virtue of sacrifice have gone thither."

The illustrious and glorious Ramachandra, highly displeased by the materialistic arguments of Javali spoke thus in terms of refutation and reproof: "O Javali, by speaking the truth, by pursuing the duties of their caste and station, by manifesting their valour in time of need, by gentle speech, by service of their spiritual preceptor, the gods and unexpected guests, men attain heaven! Therefore, those brahmins instructed in truth, pursue virtue with a single mind in accordance with their caste and station and eagerly await their entrance to Brahmaloka.[1] O Javali, I perceive with regret the action of my illustrious parent in permitting one of atheistic ideas, who has fallen from the path of rectitude enjoined in the Vedas, to remain in his court. Those who preach the heretical doctrine of the Charvaka school, are not only infidels, but have deviated from the path of truth. It is the duty of a monarch to deal with such persons as with felons, nor should men of understanding and learning stand in the presence of such atheists.

"O Javali, those versed in wisdom, who preceded thee,

[1] Brahmaloka—the abode of Shri Brahma, the Creator.

performed many holy acts by virtue of which they acquired eminence here and in the spiritual realm. Those sages have ever practised harmlessness, truth, asceticism, charity, benevolence and sacrifice.

"O Javali, those who fulfil their spiritual duty, who are the foremost in deeds of charity, and who harm none, who frequent the assemblies of the good and are revered by all men, they are without sin, their name shall live for ever as that of our illustrious Guru, Shri Vasishtha."

Rama, having uttered these harsh words to Javali, he, with humility addressed Rama saying: "O Rama, I am no atheist; on this occasion, I assumed this atheistical disguise in order to turn thee from thy purpose and persuade thee to return to the capital!"

CHAPTER 110

Vasishtha proclaiming the tradition of the dynasty, calls upon Rama to return

PERCEIVING Rama still to be indignant at the speech of Javali, the holy Vasishtha said:—

"O Rama, the Sage Javali is a believer in the transmigration of the soul; he has thus spoken through his desire to persuade thee to return to the capital. O Sovereign of Men, hear from me concerning the creation of the world.

"In the beginning, all was water, and from that element the earth was formed and after this, Brahma and other gods came into existence. The eternal, imperishable Brahma was begotten of akasha (ether) and from him came forth Marichi, and from him Kashyapa was produced. From Kashyapa was born Vivaswat, and the son of Vivaswat was Manu himself, who was the first among the Prajapatis. Ikshwaku was the son of Manu and to him the whole world was given by Manu, and Ikshwaku became the first King of Ayodhya. The son of

Ikshwaku was named Kukshi and his son was Vikukshi, whose son was the resplendent and illustrious King Vana and the great warrior Anavanya was his son. During the reign of the virtuous King Anavanya there was neither famine nor scarcity of rain nor any thief. The son of Anavanya was Prithu and his son was Trishanku. So great was Trishanku's observance of truth that he attained heaven in his embodied state. His son was the mighty Dhundhumara. The son of Dhundhumara was Yuvanashwa and his son was Mandhata. The illustrious Susandhi was the son of Mandhata and Dhruvasandhi and Prasenagita were the offspring of Susandhi. The renowned Bharata was the son of Dhruvasandhi and from Bharata sprang Ajita, against whom the great kings, Himaya, Talagangha and Shashavindu declared war. Ajita laid siege to them by building fortifications, but found their defeat beset with difficulties.

" Resigning his throne, he retired to the delightful Himalayas to devote himself to spiritual practices. It is said that one of his two queens was pregnant and the other gave her poison to destroy the foetus. The Queen Kalindi approached the Sage Chyavana, the son of Bhrigu, who resided in the Himalayas at that time, and paid him respectful homage. He, gratified, knowing her to be desirous of a son, said: 'O Goddess, thou shalt bring forth a son who will be renowned, virtuous, magnanimous, of excellent conduct, a promoter of his race and a subduer of his foes.'

" The Queen hearing this, saluted the rishi with reverence; she then returned home and brought forth a son, whose eyes resembled the lotus and who resembled Brahma in splendour. Being born with the poison that her fellow-consort had administered to her, Kalindi's son was named Sagara.

" Consecrated at a fitting season, King Sagara drained the ocean. His son was called Asamanjas, he oppressed the people and the king ordered him to be banished on account of his evil ways. The son of Asamanjas was Anshuman and his son was Dilipa. The son of Dilipa was Bhagiratha. The son of Bhagiratha was Kakustha whose son was Raghu from whom the royal line has since been named. The sons of Shri Raghu were known by the names of Pravriddha, Purushadaka, Kalmashapada and Soudasa. The son of Kalmashapada was Shankhana

who rising to great power, by a curse, was destroyed wth his whole army. The mighty hero Sudarshana was the son of Shankhana and his son was Agnivarna and Agnivarna's son was Shighraga. His son was named Meru, and Meru's son was Prashusvara, and his son was the great Sage Ambarisha. The son of Ambarisha was the truthful Prince Nahusha, whose son was the virtuous Nabhaga. Nabhaga had two sons, Aja and Suvrata, and the son of Aja was the illustrious sovereign Dasaratha. Thou art the son of the great monarch Dasaratha renowned all through the world, who reigned over earth and heaven.

" In the dynasty of Ikshwaku, the eldest son succeeds to the throne ; while the eldest son lives, none else can become king. It is not meet for thee to violate this sacred tradition of the House of Raghu. O Great One, reign over this earth filled with treasures and those extensive dominions subject to thee, as did thy sire ! "

CHAPTER III

Prince Bharata still entreats Shri Rama who is resolved to follow his father's command

HAVING spoken thus, Shri Vasishtha continued, uttering words of wisdom. " O Rama, when a man is born, he must regard as his teachers, his father, his mother and his spiritual preceptor.

" O Chief of Men, the parents bestow on man the physical frame, but the spiritual preceptor confers wisdom on him, and hence he is called Guru.

" I am the preceptor of thy father and of thee, mark my counsel and do not over-ride the way of the good. O My Son, here are thy relatives, the learned brahmins and the people of the capital, as also the warriors and merchants. Fulfil thy duty to them and do not exceed the limits of moral obligation.

" Here is thy pious and aged mother, whom thou shouldst not disobey. That man is called virtuous who renders obedience to his mother.

"O Prince, thou shalt not have swerved from the path of righteous action by acceding to Bharata's request that thou shouldst occupy the throne."

Thus, having addressed Rama with mildness, the holy Guru Vasishtha resumed his seat.

The mighty Rama then made answer, saying: "The good that parents do to their son cannot easily be recompensed. In childhood, they present him with beautiful attire and delectable dishes, they put him to rest and tenderly rub his body with oil of sesamum seed and manifest affection in gentle counsels; further they strive single-mindedly for his ultimate good.

"The commands of my sire, the author of my being, shall not be set aside."

The magnanimous Bharata hearing these words of Ramachandra, suffered great distress, and spoke to Sumantra, saying: "O Charioteer, prepare a seat of kusha grass on this trestle seat, I will place myself before Shri Rama till he be pleased to grant my request. Like a brahmin, who is destitute, I will lie at the door of this hut, fasting and covering my face, till Shri Rama consents to return to the capital."

Sumantra looking towards Shri Rama, spread the kusha grass, and Prince Bharata, full of grief, seated himself there, before his brother.

Perceiving this, Shri Rama, chief of the royal sages, said to him: "O Beloved Bharata, what wrong have I done that thou shouldst sit thus before me? A brahmin may adopt this measure towards his aggressor, but it is not meet that a crowned head should do so. O Lion among Men, rise, abandon this cruel vow and return speedily to the capital."

Bharata, afflicted, yet resolute, remaining firm, said to the people of the capital and of the country who surrounded him: "Why do you not also make entreaty to Shri Rama?"

Then they answered saying: "We are unable to press Kakustha[1] further, since he is resolved to follow his father's command."

Rama hearing their words said to Bharata: "O Prince, consider the words of thy companions versed in righteousness

[1] Kakustha—a name of Rama, as descendant of King Ikshwaku.

and weigh the matter carefully. Having reflected on their words with attention, arise, O Raghava, and undergo that which shall purify thee for having enacted that which does not become a warrior. Do thou drink water and touch me also."

Bharata rising, said: "Hear, O Brahmins, Countrymen and Warriors! I do not desire the kingdom of my father, I did not urge my mother to demand it. I knew naught of the exile of Shri Rama. If it be required that someone shall dwell in the forest in obedience to my father's command, then will I reside there for fourteen years in his stead."

Shri Rama, astonished at his brother's resolution, addressed the people present, saying: "Friends, whatever was bought, pledged or sold by the king in his lifetime, can by no means be cancelled by me or Bharata. Neither can I accept contumely and permit Bharata to go as my representative to the forest. What Kaikeyi demanded was rightfully granted by the king.

"I know Bharata to be disinterested and a true disciple of his Guru, and that excellent one is a lover of truth. I herewith declare that on my return from the forest, I shall accept the kingdom and with my virtuous brother govern the country with honour.

"O Bharata, I have discharged the boon granted to Kaikeyi by the king and vindicated his honour. Do thou liberate the king from the charge of falsehood and redeem the second boon."

CHAPTER 112

Following the advice of the celestial sages, Prince Bharata is reconciled to becoming Shri Rama's deputy

THE great sages who were present at the meeting of the two illustrious brothers, were astonished. The royal sages, those perfect ones also celestial beings, who were invisible, praised the two princes and said: "Blessed is the king, whose sons are highly virtuous and veracious, we are immeasurably gratified to hear their converse."

Desirous that the life and reign of Ravana should end soon, certain sages approached Bharata and unitedly addressed him, saying: " O Bharata, O Highly Resolute Prince, O Pious and Renowned One, recollect that thou art born in a royal line, let not the word of Rama be disregarded by thee, if thou art wishful to bring felicity to the spirit of thy parent. It is our desire that thy father who has entered heaven may be absolved from every debt, having discharged his obligations to Queen Kaikeyi."

Having spoken thus, these celestial sages returned to their abode.

Rama, gratified by their words, said: " By you, have I been assisted in upholding virtue."

Prince Bharata with trembling accents again entreated Rama, saying: " O Rama, he who is skilled in righteous governance and who is the eldest, ascends the throne. Do thou, observing the tradition, fulfil the desire of thy mother Kaushalya. I alone have neither the courage to administer so vast a dominion, nor should I be able to satisfy the people of the capital and kingdom.

" Our relatives, friends, and warriors await thy conversion to sovereignty as the husbandman eagerly anticipates the rain clouds. Therefore, O Wise One, accept the crown for thou alone art able to establish this kingdom."

Having spoken thus, Bharata fell at the feet of his brother and fervently entreated him, crying: " O Rama, O Rama."

Shri Rama, raising up the young prince who, eloquent and lotus-eyed, resembled a wild swan embraced him, and said: " That genuine humility which thou hast demonstrated will furnish thee with sufficient courage to govern the kingdom. Do thou consult thy ministers, counsellors and friends in the great work of thy rule. The moon may cease from shining, and the Himalaya abandon the snows, Mount Meru its splendour or the ocean exceed its boundary, but I shall not relinquish the vow made in the presence of my sire. O Beloved One, it is not for thee to determine whether that which was brought about by thy mother was done through love of thee, or through ambition to see thee made king, it is for thee to treat her as thy parent."

Then Prince Bharata answered Rama who resembled the sun

in glory and the new moon in splendour, saying: "O Noble One, place thy feet in these sandals adorned with gold, since soon they will furnish our only means of support and protection."

The illustrious Rama having put on the sandals, took them off and returned them to Bharata. He, bowing reverently to the sandals addressed Rama thus: "From to-day I shall for fourteen years, assuming matted locks and a robe of bark, live on fruits and roots, awaiting thy return. Offering up the management of the kingdom to these sandals for fourteen years, if I do not see thee returning on the final day of that period, I will enter the fire and be consumed!"

Shri Rama embracing Bharata with great reverence answered "Be it so." Then he spoke further saying: "Cherish thy mother Kaikeyi, and be not angry with her. In my name and in the name of Shri Sita, I adjure thee to reverence and protect Queen Kaikeyi!" His eyes suffused with tears, Shri Rama then bade farewell to Shri Bharata and Shatrughna.

Bharata offering due reverence to the ornate and glittering sandals, circumambulated Shri Rama and placed them on the head of the mighty elephant belonging to King Dasaratha. Then Shri Rama, immoveable like the Himalayas, in the practice of virtue and the promoter of the honour of the House of Raghu, made obeisance to his holy Guru, the ministers, citizens and his brothers, and dismissed them.

His mothers, overcome with grief, were unable to utter a single word. To them also Shri Rama offered reverent salutations and sorrowfully entered his own dwelling.

CHAPTER 113

Prince Bharata commences the return journey

THEN Shri Bharata, fully reconciled, taking the sandals from the head of the elephant, placed them on his own and ascended the chariot with Shatrughna, Shri Vasishtha, Vamadeva and Javali of firm vows, with all the sagacious counsellors preceding

him. Circulating the Mount Chittrakuta, they proceeded towards the east, by the river Mandakini, where they beheld countless veins of metal.

Shri Bharata with his army, went forward and at a short distance from Chittrakuta, perceived the hermitage in which the holy Bharadwaja and other sages dwelt. Approaching the hermitage of the Sage Bharadwaja, Shri Bharata having dismounted from his chariot, offered salutations to him. Bharadwaja, full of joy, said to Bharata : " O Friend, hast thou beheld Shri Rama ? Is thy purpose accomplished ? "

Shri Bharata, ever devoted to his brother, answered the sage, saying : " O Lord, I and the holy Guru Vasishtha besought Rama to return, but he cheerfully replied : ' My father's decree that I should reside in the forest for fourteen years, shall be faithfully observed by me '."

Then the learned and eloquent Shri Vasishtha, skilled in wisdom, addressed Shri Rama in this wise : " O Wise One, be pleased to bestow thy sandals, adorned with gems, on thy deputy. Do thou bear the good of the capital in thy heart.

Shri Rama, in obedience to his holy Guru, turning towards the east, put on the sandals and thereafter delivered them to me.

" Now, frustrated in my design to bring back Shri Rama, I am returning to Ayodhya with these sandals."

The Maharishi Bharadwaja, then uttered these auspicious words : " O Prince, versed in the knowledge of virtue, thine excellence is as little a source of wonder, as water ever flowing towards a hollow. King Dasaratha, possessed of a righteous and duty-loving son, such as thou art, has surely found immortality."

Shri Bharata, touching the feet of the holy rishi, in great reverence, with joined palms, circumambulated him and then, with his counsellors, proceeded to Ayodhya.

The army following Prince Bharata, some riding elephants, some horses, and some in bullock carts, crossed the Yamuna with its singing waves and came to the sacred waters of the Ganges.

Having crossed the holy river Gunga, with his companions, Shri Bharata entered the town of Shringavera and from there

passed on to Ayodhya. Beholding Ayodhya, a stricken city, deserted by his father, King Dasaratha and his brother Shri Ramachandra, Prince Bharata, deeply distressed, said to his charioteer: "Behold the ruined capital bereft of its former glory, unadorned and lacking all signs of festivity! How silent, how wretched is this city, formerly so full of life."

CHAPTER 114

He finds Ayodhya desolate

THE prince, in his chariot, which gave forth a thunderous sound as it rolled onward, entered Ayodhya. There he beheld the city where cats and owls ranged, and where the doors of the dwellings were closed, darkness and gloom reigning over all. The city resembling the planet Rohini,[1] that has lost its splendour on the moon's eclipse, or a mountain stream, whose waters have dried up in the sun's heat, deserted by the waterfowl, the fishes all having perished.

Sad and wretched, on account of its separation from Rama, Ayodhya resembled the sacrificial flame, which when the oblation is poured into it, shines like a golden cone and then sinks into smoking ash, or like a mighty army divested of its weapons in battle, its horses, elephants, chariots and standards scattered abroad and its heroic warriors slain. That city which looked, as it were, like the waves of the sea whipped into foam by the storm, rolling and breaking and then sinking into silence with the dying out of the wind, or like the sacrificial pavilion deserted by the priests who go forth in search of alms after the sacrifice; or like kine bereft of the bull, who have ceased to graze in the pasture and stand in the enclosure dispirited; or like a necklace stripped of its precious gems; or like a meteor, its virtue exhausted, fallen to earth, deprived of its splendour; or like a flowering branch, loaded with blossom in the Spring, visited

[1] Rohini—The constellation of five stars (Taurus) containing Aldebaran, which star is probably meant here. Called the "Red One" and said to be the favourite consort of the moon.

by a swarm of bees, that is suddenly consumed by a forest fire.

The streets were deserted and the fairs and markets closed, and no merchandise was offered for sale. Dark and fearful, Ayodhya resembled the moon and stars obscured by heavy clouds in the rainy season, or a deserted tavern, its revellers departed, the liquor expended and naught but fragments of broken glass and pots in wild disorder scattered here and there. Ayodhya appeared like a tank sunk into the earth, the water being spent, the foundations having collapsed, the jars and earthen vessels lying scattered amidst the thirsty, standing there in despair ; or it resembled the string of a great hero's bow that has been severed by the arrow of his adversary and is lying on the earth ; or an aged and ill-nourished mule, urged on by a soldier, slain in the battle and left unheeded.

Viewing the desolation, Prince Bharata, seated in his chariot, spoke to Sumantra, who was driving the equipage: "Alas ! How sad that this city, formerly so gay, to-day appears so melancholy, the intoxicating fragrance of floral garlands and the scent of incense, no longer filling it. O Sumantra, I do not hear, as formerly, the sound of clattering chariots, the neighing of horses and the prolonged roaring of elephants. Alas ! Since Rama departed, the young men of Ayodhya have ceased to adorn themselves with garlands of fresh blossoms and sandalwood and men no longer walk abroad decked with flowers. No longer are festivals observed and the people of the capital are merged in grief; it seems as if the glory of the city had departed with Rama. O ! Ayodhya is bereft of light, like the night overcast with clouds at the time of the waxing moon. When will my brother, Ramachandra, return like a festival, diffusing joy in Ayodhya, as do the autumnal rains ? Formerly, the royal highways of the capital were filled with richly attired youths, but to-day they are all deserted."

Wailing and lamenting, Prince Bharata entered his father's palace, which, bereft of the king, resembled a cave without a lion.

Seeing the inner compartment in complete darkness, the prince wept aloud, like the gods, when warring with the titans, are afflicted when beholding the darkening of the sun.

CHAPTER 115

Prince Bharata retires to Nandigrama and rules the kingdom from that city

THE sorrowing Bharata, firm in his resolve, having brought his mothers back to Ayodhya, said to the holy Guru Vasishtha and the elders :—

" I crave your permission to retire to Nandigrama and there endure the woes occasioned by Shri Rama's absence. The king has departed and my elder brother has entered the forest. I shall, therefore, await the return of Shri Rama, since verily he alone is Lord of Ayodhya."

Shri Vasishtha and the counsellors, hearing the words of Prince Bharata, answered him saying : " O Prince, thy words, inspired by devotion to thy brother, are worthy of praise. Verily, they do thee honour ! Who will dare oppose thee, who art deeply attached to thy brother and who, in this land, has reached such an exalted state ? "

Perceiving the counsellors reconciled to his purpose, the prince said to Sumantra : " Bring hither the chariot ! "

The chariot having come, Bharata, after conversing with his mothers, mounted the equipage with his brother Shatrughna. Accompanied by the priests and ministers, the two princes cheerfully proceeded to Nandigrama, the Guru Vasishtha and the pious brahmins leading the procession.

Then the army, elephants, horses and chariots together with the people of the capital, followed him unbidden. The peerless Bharata filled with fraternal love, carrying the sandals of Shri Rama on his head, at last reached Nandigrama. Dismounting from the chariot, he addressed his spiritual preceptor and the elders, saying : " My brother, Shri Rama, gave this kingdom to me, as a precious trust, verily these sandals, decorated with gold shall represent him."

Once more lifting the sandals reverently to his head, he addressed the people of the capital, saying : " Ye Men of Ayodhya, accept these sandals as symbols of the feet of Shri

Rama. Let them rest beneath the royal canopy and wave the chamara over them. These are the sandals of our supreme Guru and by them will righteousness be established in the kingdom. I shall preserve the trust lovingly reposed in me by Rama, till his return. When he returns to Ayodhya, I, myself, will assist him to put on the sandals. Then I, united with him once more, will deliver the kingdom to him and like a son will I honour him. By restoring the capital and kingdom to Rama, I shall wash away the stigma of dishonour brought on me by my mother. Shri Rama will be installed and his subjects made happy; then shall ill-fame pass away, and I shall win exceeding honour from the people."

Thus lamenting, the afflicted Bharata, with the assistance of his counsellors, retired to Nandigrama and ruled the kingdom from that city. With matted locks, assuming the bark dress of an ascetic, Shri Bharata dwelt in Nandigrama, protected by his army.

Residing in Nandigrama, obedient to Shri Rama and faithful to his promise, Shri Bharata, placing the sandals on the royal throne, spreading the canopy over them and waving the chamara above them, committed the seals of the kingdom to their keeping, he, himself, passing his life as a servant of Rama.

Every matter of import and all the business of state was first laid before the sandals, and every gift brought to the king was first offered to them, and afterwards treated as occasion required.

CHAPTER 116

The holy men of Chittrakuta depart, fearing the coming oppression of the asuras

BHARATA having departed to Ayodhya, Shri Rama perceived that the ascetics living on Chittrakuta were filled with apprehension and desirous of withdrawing from that place.

Formerly, these holy men dwelling in Chittrakuta looked for Shri Rama's protection, but now they sought to take their

departure. By the expression in their eyes and other signs, they manifested their misgivings and could be observed conversing secretly in low tones with one another.

Shri Rama, beholding their anxiety addressed them with humility, saying: " O Blessed Ones, has my conduct towards you suffered a change? For what reason are your hearts filled with dread? O Holy Ones, has my younger brother involuntarily injured you? Or has Shri Sita, ever devoted to my service, given you cause for offence? Perchance she has done that which is not fitting for a woman? "

Thus questioned, a great sage, an aged ascetic, his frame emaciated by austerities, tremblingly answered the Ever-Compassionate One, saying: " O Child, bounteous to all that lives, Shri Sita is innocent of any breach of the traditional attitude to any, least of all towards holy men. In truth, the reason is that the asuras, through enmity to thee, have begun to oppress the sages, and therefore, they being terrified, seek how they may defend themselves in secret.

" Ravana's younger brother Kara, who dwells here, is casting out the ascetics from their hermitages. O Friend, he is inexorable and he is a mighty warrior. He is brutal and cannot endure thy presence here. Since thou hast come to dwell in this hermitage, the asuras have increased the persecution of the sages. Appearing in grotesque and terrible forms, they fill them with terror, then to do them further mischief, they fling unclean and inauspicious objects into the sacred precincts, finally when meeting with guileless and pure-hearted hermits, they slay them. Those evil-hearted asuras wander everywhere covertly, till perceiving a sage to be alone and defenceless, they put an end to his life.

"At the time of sacrifice, when the sacred fire is kindled by the ascetics, then do the asuras, scattering the hallowed vessels and ladles,. quench the fire by discharging water over it and destroying the utensils. O Shri Ramachandra, weary of these wicked asuras, the sages are urging us to abandon these hermitages and depart hence.

" O Rama, those terrible asuras threaten to slay us all, therefore, we are leaving this hermitage. Not far distant is the wonderful Tapovana belonging to the Maharishi Ashwa;

it is rich in fruits and roots, there we would dwell. O Friend, if it seem proper to thee, do thou come there, for thine oppression is also planned.

" O Prince, though thou art able to defend thyself, thy sojourn here with thy holy consort is fraught with peril."

Hearing the words of Kulupati and perceiving their anxiety to be gone, Shri Rama sought to persuade them to stay, but in vain, and the sages departed. Shri Rama accompanied them a short distance then, taking leave of them and offering obeisance to them, returned to his sacred dwelling. On leaving the holy men, they instructed him lovingly in the path of duty and bade him farewell.

Shri Rama did not then abandon the hermitage, which the sages had deserted. Among them were a few who, inspired by Rama's example, had surrendered their hearts to him, and of them the prince was ever mindful.

CHAPTER 117

Shri Rama decides to leave the hermitage and comes to the ashrama of the Sage Atri

THE rishis, having left the hermitage, Shri Rama reflected on the matter and judged it wisest not to dwell there longer.

Remembrance of his people, his mothers and Prince Bharata who had been united with him there, caused him unending distress. Further, the elephants and horses of Bharata's army had defiled and laid waste the ground, rendering it squalid and foul. On mature reflection, he thought " We will depart hence " and taking Shri Sita and Lakshmana with him, he left that place.

Proceeding further, he came to the ashrama of the Sage Atri, and made obeisance to him, that holy one regarding him with a fatherly affection. He bestowed his favour likewise on Sita and Lakshmana and treated Rama with the hospitality due to him.

The virtuous Sage Atri, ever devoted to the good of all, summoned his aged and pious wife Anasuya, and respectfully asking her to be seated, addressed his worthy and excellent spouse. He said: "Shri Sita has visited our hermitage, do thou take her with thee and receive her hospitably."

Then the Sage Atri said to Ramachandra: "Formerly when rain was withheld for a period of ten years and the earth dried up, this virtuous woman, Anasuya, by her great austerity, produced fruits and berries for the sages and caused the sacred Ganges to descend so that they might bathe therein; thus by her arduous ascetic practices, did she dispel the impediments in the path of the sages. O Sinless Rama, this is the same Anasuya, who at one time, to succour the sages, caused ten nights to be reduced to one. This Anasuya is to be highly revered for her age's sake, and is the object of reverence of all beings. Do thou permit the Princess Sita to accompany the meek and aged Anasuya. By her great and noble deeds, she has acquired immeasurable fame. Let Janaki attend her."

Then Shri Ramachandra answered, "Be it so," and the illustrious prince said to Sita: "O Princess, thou hast heard the words spoken by the sage; for thine own good do thou wait on this aged ascetic."

Thereafter, Shri Sita went with Anasuya who was proficient in every virtue. On account of her age, her physical form was feeble and emaciated, her hair grey, whilst her body trembled like a palm tree agitated by a strong wind.

Uttering her name, Shri Sita made obeisance to her, the gentle saint returning her salutation with great humility enquiring as to her welfare. The aged Anasuya, beholding Shri Sita offering humble obeisance, spoke encouraging words, saying:—

"O Sita, fortunate art thou, that thou art attentive to the duties owed to thy consort. It is supremely auspicious that thou, forsaking thy people, thy individual comfort, thy wealth and thy possessions shouldst accompany thy husband to the forest.

"She who is devoted to her spouse, whether in the city or the forest, regardless whether he be a sinner or virtuous, that woman attains the highest region. Whether a husband be cruel, or the slave of desires, or poor, a virtuous wife will continue

to worship him as a god. O Princess, I have studied deeply and I do not think that a woman can have a better friend than her husband, for he, in all circumstances, protects her.

" O Princess of Videha, those evil women who, enslaved by desire, do not regard what should or should not be done, O Princess of Mithila, they, imprudently commit unworthy acts and becoming abhorrent, fall from virtue. But women such as thou, acquainted with what is good or evil in the world, like pious men, attain heaven. O Sati, thou hast ever been faithful to thy conjugal duty and through thy virtuous acts, undertaken in conjunction with thy husband, shalt attain merit and fame."

CHAPTER 118

Princess Sita receives gifts of love from the sage's wife

THE blameless Anasuya having spoken, Shri Sita, approving her words, gently answered : " O Noble Lady, the advice thou hast given me, is in no wise a source of wonder to me, for it is my conviction that the husband is in authority over his wife. Even if the husband be poor and ignorant, yet women, such as I, should feel no aversion for him.

" But the husband who is worthy of praise on account of his excellent qualities and who is compassionate, self-controlled, constant in his affections, fully acquainted with his duty and who manifests the loving-kindness of a parent, excels all expectation.

" Whatever love Shri Ramachandra bears to his mother Kaushalya, he bestows equally on the other queens, and not this alone, but whoever the king has looked on with affection, that woman he also regards as his own mother.

" When departing for the fearful forest, my mother-in-law, Queen Kaushalya, imparted certain instruction to me, and I inscribed her words on the tablet of my heart. I call to mind also the advice given me by mine own mother at the time of my nuptials.

"O Righteous One, the crowning discipline for a woman is the service of her lord. To-day, thou hast awakened in my memory the counsels formerly given to me by my relatives.

"To-day, Savitri dwells in heaven through the service of her spouse, thou also shalt enter the supreme abode through service of thy lord. Rohini, a pearl among women and a dweller in the celestial region, ever accompanies the moon. Thus many others who have followed virtue, with fixed resolve, enter heaven through their merits."

Anasuya rejoiced to hear Sita's words and kissing her head in benediction, said: "O Sita, much merit has accrued to me by prayer and fasting. O Princess, pure in heart, I desire to confer a boon on thee by virtue of these merits. Tell me what thou dost desire? O Princess of Mithila, thy words have given me extreme satisfaction. Now say what good I may accomplish in thy name."

Shri Sita, hearing the words of the pious Anasuya, versed in domestic duty, and being filled with astonishment, answered smilingly: "Thy loving kindness has already fulfilled my every desire."

Shri Anasuya hearing these words was gratified in greater measure and said: "O Sita, fortunate am I to behold thee! Let my joy bear fruit, ask a boon. I can give thee celestial garlands, apparel and precious unguents to adorn thy person. O Daughter of Janaka, my gifts would enhance thy beauty, they will never fade and they will become thee well. Apply this powder which I now give to thee; thou shalt, by this, augment thy husband's beauty as Lakshmi increases the glory of the imperishable Vishnu."

The princess accepted the robes, powder and ornaments, gifts of love, from the ascetic. The illustrious Sita, having received the symbols of affection from Anasuya, sat down near her with joined palms.

Then Anasuya requested Shri Sita to relate something of moment, saying: "O Sita, I have heard a brief account of thy wedding, describe it to me now in detail."

Shri Sita obediently answered: "Hear me, and I will relate it all to thee. The King of Mithila, that brave and virtuous monarch, Janaka, the protector of his people as befits a warrior,

once, when ploughing the earth to establish sacrificial ground, beheld me like a daughter emerging from the furrow. At that time, the king repeating the holy texts, was scattering the seed of herbs and, seeing my body besmeared with dust, was astonished. Being without issue, he took me in his arms and said, ' This shall be my daughter ', and treated me with extreme love. Then a voice rang out from the heavens, saying: ' O King, verily she is thy daughter.'

" The king rejoiced in my possession and since my birth his prosperity has increased. That sovereign, constant in the performance of sacrifice, gave me into the care of his chief queen, she nourishing me with maternal affection. When I came to maturity, my father grew anxious, like an indigent man who is bereft of all he possesses.

" The father of a daughter, be he equal to Indra, must defer to his son-in-law, whether in status he be his peer or his inferior. My father was willing to submit to this eventuality and was consumed with anxiety, as one desirous of crossing a river, who finds himself without the means of transport.

"After much seeking, he was unable to find a suitable bridegroom and was beset with fears. On profound reflection, he resolved to convene a meeting of princes, that I might elect a husband.

" In ancient days, on the occasion of a sacrifice, one of our royal forbears received from Varuna, a great bow with two quivers that should never lack arrows. The bow was so heavy that many persons together could not move it and no monarch could draw it, even in dream.

" By his merit, my honoured sire had acquired the bow and he, summoning the kings in council, addressed them, saying: ' Ye Sovereigns of Men, I will give my daughter in marriage to him who is able to lift up and string this bow.'

" The kings, beholding the bow resembling a mountain in weight, unable to lift it up, made obeisance to it and went their way.

"After a long time, the resplendent Ramachandra came to my father's sacrifice in company with the Sage Vishwamitra. The king, my father, offered that truth-loving hero together with the Sage Vishwamitra, abundant hospitality.

"Then Shri Vishwamitra said to the king: 'These are the two sons of King Dasaratha, who desire to see the bow. Be gracious enough to allow these two princes to view it.'

"King Janaka commanded the bow to be brought as requested by the Sage Vishwamitra.

"In an instant, Shri Ramachandra, lifting the bow, drew it. Having been bent by the thong, the bow broke in two, creating a sound like the crash of thunder. Thereafter, my honoured father caused water to be brought and offered to Shri Ramachandra and prepared to bestow me on him, but Shri Ramachandra did not consent to accept my hand till the intentions of his own father were known.

"King Janaka then requested the aged King Dasaratha to come thither and he, acquiescing in the matter, did so. With his approval I was pledged to the great-souled Ramachandra; my younger sister, a guileless girl, Urmila, being wedded to Shri Lakshmana.

"O Great Ascetic, thus was I bestowed in marriage and since then have taken extreme delight in ministering to my Lord, Shri Ramachandra, as is my duty."

CHAPTER 119

The holy ascetics bless the exiles who enter the forest

SHRI ANASUYA, faithful to duty, listened to this stirring narrative and, taking hold of Shri Sita's hands, embraced her, savouring the fragrance of her locks, then she addressed her, saying: "I have heard thy tale brilliantly and lucidly set forth, which thou hast so singularly related to me. O Sweet-speaking One, I would fain hear more of thy story, but the sun has gone down behind the Asatalachala mountain and the lovely night is near at hand. See! the birds who have sought food far and wide all the day, are now returning home to rest. Hark! how they sing! The holy ascetics, too, are returning from their bathing in their wet robes of bark with loshtas in their hands.

The smoke, in hue resembling a pigeon's neck, rising from the Sages' sacred fires is being driven by the wind here and there. The bare trees, scarcely seen in the distance, appear like dense clouds in the gathering darkness. The light is slowly fading in every quarter. See, the rangers of the night are abroad and the deer of the Tapovana forest are sleeping round the sacred altars. Behold ! O Sita ! The night adorned with stars is come and the moon diffusing her light has appeared in the heavens.

"Do thou go, O Princess, and minister to thy lord, Shri Ramachandra. How fortunate am I to have had sweet converse with thee ! O Princess, do thou attire thyself in these robes and ornaments, and thus increase my delight."

Shri Sita adorning herself in the gorgeous apparel, placed her head at the feet of Anasuya and departed.

Shri Ramachandra, that most eloquent one, seeing Sita adorned with the ornaments given to her by Anasuya, was filled with joy. Shri Sita then told him of the liberality of the aged ascetic, and showed him all her gifts. Rare indeed were those gifts and Shri Rama and the great warrior Shri Lakshmana, rejoiced over the bounty of Anasuya.

The night passed and day dawned, the two princes bathed, performed their morning devotions and then approached the ascetics for food.

The pious hermits then addressed Shri Rama and said : "O Prince, it is dangerous to wander in the forest on account of the presence of asuras. O Prince, wandering about in various guises, these beings feed on human flesh and drink the blood of men. These creatures like wild beasts kill and devour any ascetic who is negligent or impure. O Prince, for our sake, do thou destroy them. This path, O Prince, is the way by which the sages go to gather fruit, let it be thy path also."

Then the holy men humbly blessed Shri Rama and he, the harasser of his foes, entered the forest as the sun enters a dark cloud.

END OF AYODHYA KANDA.

GLOSSARY

(*Note:* For Flowers, Trees, and Weapons, see separate Glossaries.)

ACHMANA ceremony—purificatory rite, at which water is taken in the palms of the hands, and poured on the head and breast.

ADITI. Mother of the Gods, representing space and infinity.

ADITYAS. Sun gods, sons of Aditi.

AGASTYA. A rishi, reputed author of several hymns in the Rig-Veda.

AGNI. God of fire.

AHALYA. Wife of the Rishi Gautama, who was transformed into a rock by his curse and ultimately restored by Shri Rama.

ALAKA. The capital of Kuvera q.v.

AMARAVATI. The capital of Indra q.v.

AMRITA. " The Nectar of Immortality " produced by the churning of the ocean by devas and asuras.

ANANGA. Bodiless. A name of Kandarpa, the God of Love.

ANASUYA. A great saint, wife of the Rishi Atri.

ANGA. The kingdom ruled over by King Lomapada, probably Bengal.

APSARAS. "Ap " meaning water. " Yara " to emerge from—water sprites, they were the wives of the Gandharvas q.v.

ARGHYA. A ceremonial offering of water, milk, kusha grass, rice, durva, sandalwood, flowers, etc.

ARYAMANA. Chief of the pittris or ancestors.

ASHABA. When the sun enters the sign Gemini.

ASHOKA. One of King Dasaratha's counsellors.

ASHRAMA. Hermitage.

ASWA-MEDHA. Horse-sacrifice of Vedic times, performed only by kings.

ASWINI-KUMARAS or ASWINS. The celestial horsemen, precursors of the dawn, twin offspring of Surya the sun god.

ASURA. A demon, enemy of the Gods.

ATHARVA VEDA. The fourth Veda.

ATRI. One of the seven immortal sages.

ATYARTHA SADAKA. One of King Dasaratha's chief counsellors.

AYODHYA. Capital of Koshala, the kingdom ruled over by King Dasaratha, probably Oudh.

AYURVEDA. " The Veda of Life." A work on medicine attributed to the Sage Dhanwantari.

B

BAHADUR. A title of honour.
BALA and ATIBALA. A mystical science or magic formulae used for the discharge of sacred weapons.
BALI or VALI. Brother of Sugriva, the monkey King. Bali was slain by Shri Rama.
BHAGIRATHA. Descendant of King Sagara, whose austerities caused the sacred river Ganges to come down to earth.
BHAGIRATHI. A name of the river Ganges or Gunga after the Sage Bhagiratha.
BHARATA. Brother of Shri Rama and son of Queen Kaikeyi and Dasaratha.
BHARATVARSH. Ancient India.
BHARADWAJA. A Vedic Sage, to whom many Vedic hymns are attributed. He received the sons of King Dasaratha in the forest and entertained them there.
BHRIGU. A Vedic Sage, said to be the son of Manu, the Progenitor of mankind.
BHUR, BHUVAH, SWAH. Lower, middle and upper worlds.
BIBISHANA or VIBISHANA—Brother of Ravana, but a devotee of Shri Rama, who conferred the Kingdom of Lanka on him after Ravana's death.
BISHAKA or VISHAKA. A devotee of abstraction of mind, or the constant contemplation of the Deity.
BRAHMAN. The Absolute, The Highest Reality, Attributeless Being.
BRAHMA. The creative aspect of Divinity, Shri Vishnu being the maintaining aspect as opposed to Shri Shiva the destructive aspect.
BRAMACHARI. Religious student, living in the house of a spiritual Teacher, having taken certain vows.
BRAHMACHARINI. Feminine of Brahmachari.
BRAHMA-JNANA. Knowledge of Truth or the Highest Reality, Brahman.
BRATASURA or VRATASURA or VRITRA—An asura slain by Indra.
BRIHASPATI. Jupiter, the Spiritual Preceptor of the Gods, also the Regent of the planet Jupiter.

C

CASTES, the Four—priest, warrior, merchant and those who serve the other three.
CHAKRA VAKA. Brahmany duck or ruddy goose.
CHAMARA—Chowrie, a fan made of Yak's tail, insignia of royalty.
CHANDALA. An outcaste.
CHITRA. The planet SPICA. The month CHITRA or CHAITRA is approximately between February and March.
CHITRARATHA. King of the Gandharvas, celestial musicians.
CHITTRAKUTA. A sacred mountain, the residence of Shri Rama and Sita in exile, still a holy retreat.

D

DAITYAS. Titans.
DAKSHA. Son of Shri Brahma ; his daughter UMA was the consort of Shiva.
DAKSHINA. Traditional offering made after a sacred ceremony.
DANAVAS. A race of giants, enemies of the Gods.
DANDAKA. A vast forest lying between the rivers Godavari and Narmada, the scene of Shri Rama and Sita's exile.
DASARATHA. King of Koshala, father of Shri Rama, Lakshmana Bharata and Shatrughna.
DEVAS. The Gods or Shining Ones.
DEVI. A title given to Parvati, Shiva's consort.
DHANUDA. A name of Kuvera.
DHARA. Wife of the Sage Kasyapa.
DHARMA. Traditionally ordained course of conduct, or duty. The Law of Righteousness.
DHRISTI. One of the chief counsellors of King Dasaratha.
DHUMA. God of Smoke.
DHUNDHUMARA. Slayer of the demon Dhundu, a title of the King Kuvalayaswa.
DILIPA. Father of the Sage Bharadwaja.
DITI. Daughter of Daksha, wife of Kasyapa, mother of the Daityas.
DIVISIONS of Time, the Three—Past, present and future.
DRONA. A measure approximating 92 lbs.
DUNDHUBI. The name of a giant, it also means a kettle drum.
DUSANA. A demon slain by Shri Rama.
DYUMATSENA. Prince of S'abra, father of Satyavanta.

GADHI. Father of the Sage Vishwamitra and son of King Kushanaba, hence the patronymic Kaushika.
GANDHAMADANA. A general of the monkey army, killed by Indrajita, also the name of a mountain, " The Mount of Intoxicating Fragrance ".
GANDHARVAS. Celestial musicians.
GANGES. The sacred river Gunga, also known as Bhagirathi, Harasekhara or the Crest of Shiva, Khapaga, Flowing from Heaven, Tripathaga, Three-way-flowing, Mandakini, Gently flowing, Jahnavi after the Sage Jahnu.
GARUDA. King of birds, the Vehicle of Shri Vishnu and the Destroyer of serpents.
GAUTAMA. A great sage, the husband of Ahalya, q.v.
GAYATRI. The most sacred prayer of the Rig-Veda.
GODHA. A piece of leather or metal worn on the left arm to protect it from the bow-string.
GOHA. A soft leather, possibly cow or doeskin.
GRIHI. A person who, having finished his education, marries and becomes a householder.

GUHA. King of the Nishadas, a mountain tribe, a great devotee of Shri Rama.
GURU. A traditional Teacher, one who dispels ignorance.

H

HANUMAN. A monkey chief, son of Pavana and Anjana. Hanuman was the ideal devotee and servant of Shri Rama.
HARI. A name of the Lord meaning " Captivating ", " Pleasing ".
HAWAN. A particular offering to the Gods, an ancient fire ceremony.

I

IKSHWAKU. Son of Manu, founder of the Solar race of Kings, who reigned in Ayodhya.
INDRA. The King of the Gods or Devas.
INGUDI TREE. Sacred fig tree.

J

JAGARI. Coarse brown Indian sugar made from palm sap.
JAHNU. The sage who drank up the sacred river Ganges.
JAMBUDWIPA. One of the seven continents of which the world was said to be composed.
JANAKA. King of Mithila, father of Sita.
JANAKI. A name of Sita.
JAPA. Silent repetition of a prayer or sacred formula.
JATAYU. King of the vultures, who fought Ravana when he was abducting Sita.
JAYA. Producer of weapons.
JAYANTA. King Dasaratha's counsellor.
JUTA. The matted locks of a devotee.

K

KABANDHA. An asura or demon.
KAIKEYA. The kingdom ruled over by King Kaikeya.
KAIKEYI. Favourite Queen and consort of King Dasaratha, mother of Bharata.
KAILASHA. Sacred mountain, the abode of Shiva.
KALINDI. Wife of King Asit.
KAMA or KANDARPA. Indian cupid or God of Love.
KAPILA. A great sage, who destroyed the sons of King Sagara.
KARMA. The law governing the behaviour of matter in all its gross and subtle forms, according to the divine purpose.
KARTTIKA. When the sun enters Libra (October).
KARTTIKEYA. God of war, son of Shiva, also called Skanda,

KASYAPA or KASHYAPA. The great Vedic Sage, grandson of Brahma, and father of Vivaswat.

KATYAYANA. An ancient writer of great celebrity, author of the Dharmashastra.

KAUPIN. Loin cloth.

KAUSHALYA. Chief Queen of King Dasaratha and mother of Shri Rama.

KAUSHIKA. Title of Vishwamitra after his grandfather.

KAUSHIKI. A river, said to be the sister of Shri Vishwamitra.

KAUSTUBHA. Celebrated jewel, churned from the ocean and worn by Shri Vishnu.

KAVANDAVA. A species of duck.

KAVYAHANAS. A special class of celestial being.

KESHNI. Chief Queen of King Sagara.

KHARA. A demon.

KHIVA or KHEEVA. Frumenty: hulled wheat boiled in milk and sweetened.

KINDS OF TASTE. See under "Six".

KINNERAS. Celestial Beings attendant on Kuvera.

KISHKINDHYA. The country ruled over by Bali (possibly Mysore) given to Sugriva by Rama.

KOSHALA. The kingdom ruled over by King Dasaratha.

KRAUNCHA. A species of heron, Ardea Jaculator.

KRITTIKAS. The Pleiades, nurses of the God of War.

KSHIRODA. The ocean of milk.

KUBIJA. Hunchback.

KUMBHAKARNA. Brother of Ravana, a great warrior killed by Shri Rama.

KUSHA. One of the sons of Shri Rama and Sita. (See Lava.)

KUVERA. God of wealth.

LAGNAS. The twelve signs of the Zodiac are considered as rising above the horizon in the course of the day. The Lagna has the name of the sign, its duration is from the first rising of the sign till the whole is above the horizon. Lagna literally means the point where the horizon and the path of the planet meet.

LAGNA-KARKA. Cancer.

LAGNA-MEENA. Pisces.

LAKSHMANA. Son of Queen Sumitra and King Dasaratha, favourite brother of Shri Rama. Shri Lakshmana was said to be an incarnation of the thousand-headed serpent SHESHA who upholds the world.

LAKSHMI. The consort of Shri Vishnu also known as "Shri" signifying prosperity.

LANKA. Ceylon, the Kingdom ruled over by the Titan King, Ravana.

LAVA. One of the sons of Shri Rama and Sita. (See Kusha.)
LAVANA. Son of Madhu, a demon.
LOHITANGA. Mars.
LOKAPALAS. Guardians of the four quarters.
LOSHTA. A vessel of coconut or metal used for begging or ceremonial purposes.

M

MADHUPARKA. A mixture of curds, butter, honey and the milk of coconut, a traditional offering.
MADHUSUDANA. Name of Shri Vishnu, meaning Destroyer of Madhu, a demon.
MAGDA-PHALGUNI. The season from the middle of January to the middle of March.
MAGHAVAN. A title of the god, Indra.
MAHADEVA. Great God, a title of Shiva.
MAHATMA. Great-souled One, title given to a Sage or Rishi.
MAINA. Mina or Mynah, a small percher, about the size of a swallow, which can be taught to repeat words.
MAIREYI or MIREYA. Liquor extracted from the blossom of the Lythrum Fricticosum tree mixed with sugar.
MAITRA. Period of the early morning.
MANASOROVARA. Lake on Mount Kailasha (literally: Lake of the Mind).
MANDAVI. Bharata's wife.
MANDODARI. Wife of Ravana.
MANTHARA. The hunchbacked maid of Queen Kaikeyi.
MANTRAS or MANTRAMS. Sacred formulas.
MANTRA-PALA. One of King Dasaratha's chief counsellors.
MARICHA. A demon.
MARKANDEYA. A sage, remarkable for his austerities, author of the Markandeya Purana.
MARUTS. Storm Gods.
MATALI. Indra's charioteer.
MAYA. The deluding power (Shakti) of the Lord, by which the universe has come into existence and appears to be real.
MEGHA. Regent of the clouds.
MINAKA. A mountain north of Kailasha.
MITHILA. The city ruled over by King Janaka, capital of Videha.
MLECCHAS. Foreigners, barbarians, eaters of flesh.
MUNI. A holy sage, a pious and learned person, title applied to rishis and others.

N

NAGAS. The serpent race.
NAHUSHA. Father of King Yayati. Nahusha's curious story is found in the Mahabharata and Puranas.

Nakshatras. The Hindus, beside the common division of the Zodiac into twelve signs, divided it into 27 Nakshatras, 2¼ in each sign. Each Nakshatra has its appropriate name :—

1. Aswini. 2. Bharani. 3. Krittika. 4. Rohini. 5. Mr'gasiras. 6. Ardea. 7. Punarvasu. 8. Pushya. 9. Alesha. 10. Magna. 11. Purva-phalguni. 12. Uttaraphalguni. 13. Hasta. 14. Chitra. 15. Svati. 16. Vishaka. 17. Anuradha. 18. Jyesatha. 19. Mula. 20. Purvashadha. 21. Uttarashraddha. 22. Abijit. 23. Sravana. 24. Sravishtha or Dhanishta. 25. Shatabhishaj. 26. Purva Bhadrapada. 27. Uttara-Bhadrapada. 28. Revati.

(The last used if 22 Abijit is omitted.)

Nala and Nila. Monkey chiefs, allies of Shri Rama, who built the bridge from India to Ceylon.

Nandigrama. The city fiom which Shri Bharata ruled in the absence of Shri Rama.

Nandimukha. Distribution of cows in charity after a sacred ceremony.

Narada. A great rishi, son of Shri Brahma; many hymns of the Rig Veda are attributed to him.

Narayana. A name of Shri Vishnu, "He whose abode is the waters".

Nishadas. A mountain tribe dwelling in the Vindhya mountains subsisting on hunting.

Pampa. A beautiful lake on the banks of which Shri Rama and Sita stayed during their exile.

Parantapa. Oppressor of the enemy, title of respect.

Parasurama. Rama with the axe, 6th Avatara or Incarnation of Shri Vishnu, the son of Yamadagni and Renuka.

Parvati. A name of Uma, consort to Lord Shiva.

Patala. The infernal regions.

Pavana. The father of Shri Hanuman.

Payasa. A special preparation of rice in milk.

Pisachas. Ghosts.

Pittris. Spirits of the Ancestors.

Poulastya. One of the seven Great Sages.

Prajapati. "Lord of Creatures," a creator, title given to Shri Brahma as also to his mind-born sons.

Prayaga. The confluence of the Ganges and the Yamuna, a sacred spot.

Punarvasu. The 7th and most favoured Nakshatra q.v.

Puranas. Legends and tales of ancient times in epic form, eighteen in number.

Pusha or Pushan. The sun.

Pushpaka. The aerial chariot used by King Ravana and later Shri Rama.

PUSHYA. The name of the 6th lunar mansion, also of a constellation of three stars.

PUTTRESTI. Ceremony for extending the race by having sons.

RAGHAVA. Title of those belonging to the House of Raghu to which King Dasaratha and Shri Rama belonged.

RAHU. A mythical demon said to cause the eclipse of sun and moon.

RAJASUYA sacrifice. A great sacrifice performed in ancient times at the installation of a king.

RAKSHASAS. Demons.

RAMA or RAMACHANDRA. The Incarnation of Shri Vishnu, and the eldest son of King Dasaratha. It is round this great figure that the Ramayana is constructed.

RAMA-KATHA. The recitation of Ramayana which has been a tradition in India for thousands of years.

RAMBHA. An apsara (q.v.) symbolising the perfection of female beauty from Indra's realm.

RAVANA. King of Lanka, a ten-headed demon who abducted Sita, Rama's consort.

RISHI. An illumined sage. There are four classes of Rishi :—
Rajarishi—a royal Rishi,
Maharishi—a great Rishi,
Brahmarishi—a sacred Rishi,
Devarishi—a divine Rishi.

RISHYASRINGA. The " Deer-horned " Son of the Sage Vibhandaka who married the daughter of King Lomapada, Shanta, and later performed the Puttresti ceremony (q.v.) for King Dasaratha.

RISHYA-MUKHA. A mountain, the abode of Sugriva, the monkey

SADHYAS. Demi-gods.

SAMPATI. The vulture, brother of Jatayu q.v.

SAMUDRA. Lord of rivers, guilty of slaying a brahmin.

SANAT-KUMARA. Mind-born son of Shri Brahma, the Creator.

SAPINDI ceremony. The establishing of a connection with kindred through funereal offerings.

SAPURNA. A name of Garuda q.v.

SARABHA. Legendary animal with eight legs.

SARAYU. Sacred river, the Sarju river.

SATYAVANTA. The husband of Savitri q.v.

SATYAVATI. A sister of Shri Vishwamitra, transformed into the Kaushiki river.

SATYA-YUGA. The Golden Age. There are four ages :—
The Satya or Golden Age.
The Treta or Silver Age.

The Dwapara or Copper Age.
Kali or Iron Age.

SAURA. Literally relating to the sun, a divine potion.

SAVITRI. Daughter of King Aswapati who rescued her husband Satyavanta from the God of death.

SHABALA. The wish-fulfilling cow belonging to Shri Vasishtha.

SHABARI or SHIBRI. A female ascetic, great devotee of Shri Rama, whom he visited in the forest.

SHAKRA. A name of the God Indra.

SHAKRA-DHWAZA. A ceremony in honour of Indra.

SHANTA. Daughter of King Lomapada, married to the Sage Rishyasringa.

SHARABHANGA. A hermit Sage visited by Shri Rama and Sita in the Dandaka forest.

SHASTRA. Teachings of divine or recognised authority.

SHATANANDA. Son of the Sage Gautama and spiritual preceptor at the Court of King Janaka.

SHATRUGHNA. Fourth son of King Dasaratha, son of Queen Sumitra.

SHRI or SRI. A name of Lakshmi the consort of Shri Vishnu. Also a title of honour of Gods, kings and heroes.

SHIVA. Lord of Bliss, He who destroys ignorance.

SHIVYA or SHIVI. A king of the Raghu dynasty who rescued the god Agni who had transformed himself into a pigeon and was pursued by Indra in the form of a hawk, by offering the weight of the pigeon in his own flesh.

SHONA. A sacred river.

SHRUTA-KIRTTI. Wife of Shatrughna.

SHUDRA. Lowest of the four castes.

SHUKRA. Brilliant, bright, name of the star Venus.

SHUNAKA, SHUNASHEPHA } Sons of the Sage Richika.

SHURPARNAKHA. Sister of Ravana, a female demon, mutilated by Shri Rama and Lakshmana.

SIDDHARTA. One of King Dasaratha's counsellors.

SIDDHAS. Semi-divine beings who dwell between the earth and the sun.

SINDHU. The river Indus, also a country east of Koshala.

SINGHIKA. A female demon, who imprisoned the shadows of her victims.

SITA. Literally "a furrow". Daughter of King Janaka, consort of Shri Rama.

SIX KINDS OF TASTE. Sweet, bitter, acid, salt, pungent, acrid or harsh.

SKANDA. God of war, son of Shiva.

SOMA. The fermented juice of Asclepias-acida, used as a beverage or libation in sacred ceremonies.

SOURWA, SOURASHTRA } Countries east of Koshala.

SUCHENA. Son of Varuna, Lord of the waters.

SUGRIVA. Monkey King, a friend of Shri Rama who gave him the Kingdom of Kishkindhya.

SUMANTRA. Prime minister of King Dasaratha.

SUMATI. Younger wife of King Sagara, who gave birth to a gourd containing sixty thousand sons.

SUMITRA. One of the queens of King Dasaratha, mother of Lakshmana and Shatrughna.

SUPRABHA. A goddess who created divine weapons.

SURAS. A name of the Gods.

SUTIKSHNA. A hermit sage who dwelt in the Dandaka forest.

SUYAJNA. A spiritual director of King Dasaratha.

SWYAMBHU. The Self-existent, a name of the Creator, Shri Brahma.

TAPOVANA. A forest much frequented by holy sages.

TARA. The daughter of Brihaspati q.v.

TARAKA. A female demon.

THREE DIVISIONS OF TIME—Past, present and future.

THREE WORLDS, The—Bhur, Bhurah, Swah, Lower, middle and upper worlds.

TRIPATHAKA. Traverser of the Three Worlds, a name of the sacred river Ganges.

TRIPURA. A demon slain by Shiva.

TRISHANKU. A King of the Solar race who desired to enter heaven in his physical form and later became the planet of that name through the powers of the Sage Vishwamitra.

TRISHIRA. A demon slain by Shri Rama.

U

UMA. A name of Parvati, Shiva's consort.

UPA-NAYA. The ceremony of investitute of the sacred thread by which act, spiritual birth is conferred on the youth and he is reckoned a member of the Twice-born (brahmins) class. The age when this ceremony takes place is between eight and sixteen years.

UPENDRA. A name of Indra.

URMILA. The wife of Shri Lakshmana.

UTTARA-PHALGUNI. The twelfth Nakshatra q.v.

VAIDYA. A physician.

VAIKUNTHA. The abode of Shri Vishnu.

VAISHYAS. The merchant or agricultural caste.

VAJA-PEYA. A sacrifice at which an acetous mixture of meal and water is offered to the Gods.

VALMIKI. The Great Sage, author of Ramayana.

VAMADEVA. A Vedic Rishi, author of many hymns.
VAMANA. The Holy Dwarf, fifth divine Incarnation of Shri Vishnu.
VARUNA. Lord of the waters, the Indian Neptune.
VARUNI. Daughter of Varuna,, who symbolises wine.
VASISHTHA. One of the seven great sages. He was the spiritual preceptor of the House of Raghu.
VASUKI. King of the Snakes.
VAYU. God of the winds.
VEDA. The Holy Scriptures of the Hindu religion. Fountain of divine knowledge.
VIBHANDAKA. Son of the Sage Kasyapa and father of Rishyasringa.
VIDARBHA. The country which is probably Birar, whose capital was Kundinapura.
VINA. A stringed musical instrument.
VINATA. The mother of Garuda.
VIROCHANA. A giant, father of Bali.
VISHAKA. One of the Nakshatras (q.v.), also a month of the Spring season.
VISHNU. The divine Maintainer of the Universe.
VISHWAMITRA. A great sage, whose story is told in the Ramayana.
VRATRASURA or VRITRA. See BRATRASURA.

YAKSHA, YASHINI. Supernatural beings attendant on the God of wealth, Kuvera.
YAMA. The God of Death.
YAYATI. A forbear of King Dasaratha, his story appears in several of the great classics, Vishnu-Purana, Mahabharata, etc.
YOGA. A school of philosophy of which the most important is the Adwaita (non-dualist) system elaborated by Shri Shankaracharya.
YOJANA. Approximately eight miles.

AGNEYA. The fiery weapon.
ALAKSHYA. That which cannot be seen in its course.
ARDEA. The web (see Shuska).
ARHANI. The thunderbolt.
AVANGMUKHA. Weapon with head hanging.
AVARANA. Weapon of Protection.

B

BRAHMA-PASHA. Net or noose of Brahma. (Pasha meaning a rope.)
BRAHMASHIRA. Brahma-headed.

D

DANDA or DUNDA. Literally staff. Rod of punishment.
DARANA. To tear or split asunder.
DARPANA. Drying-up weapon.
DASHAKSHA. The ten-eyed weapon.
DASHA-SHIRSHA. The ten-headed weapon.
DHANA. Weapon of wealth.
DHANYA. Rice weapon.
DHARMA DISCUS or DHARMA PALA. The noose of the God of Justice.
DHARMA-NABHA. Of sacred navel.
DHARMA-PASHA. One who has the power of entangling the foe.
DHRISHTA. The active weapon.
DHRITI. Weapon of forbearance.
DISC OF DHARMA. Disc of virtue.
DISC OF KALA. Disc of death.
DITYA. The titan.
DRIRNABHA. Of firm navel.
DUNDA-NABHA. The Dunda navelled.

G

GANDHARVA. Weapon given by the Gandharvas, celestial musicians,

H

HAYA-SHIRA. The horse-headed.

I

INDRA. The weapon of Indra.
ISHIKA. The ardent weapon.

J

JYOTISHMA. The luminous.

K

KALA DISCUS. See Disc of Kala.
KALA-PASHA. Death noose.
KAMARUCHI. Able to do what it pleases.
KAMARUPA. Able to assume any form at will.
KANDARPA. Creating sex desire.
KANKANA. Weapon protecting the side (possibly some kind of armour).
KAPALA. A helmet.
KARAVIRA. Weapon of the valiant hand.
KINKINI. A small bell.
KOUMODAKI. Giving joy to the earth.
KROUNCHA. From the bird of that name, *q.v.*

L

LAKSHYA. That which may be seen in its course.
LOHITA MUKHI. Bloody mouthed.

M

MAHA NABHA. Large navelled.
MAHA VAHU. The great armed or handed.
MAKARA. The sea monster.
MALI. The necklaced.
MANAVA. Weapon of Manu.
MATHANA. Weapon that hurts or injures.
MAYADHARA. The great deception.
MODANA. The weapon of inebriation.
MOHA. That which causes loss of consciousness.
MOHAN. The weapon of attraction.
MUSHALA or MOUSHALA. A club.

N

NANDANA. Joy-producing weapon.
NARAYANA. Literally—residing in water.
NIRASHYA. The discourager.
Nishkali. The peaceful.

O

P

PAISHA ASTRA. The ghostly weapon, one belonging to the Pisachas, ghosts or demons.
PARAMO DARA ASTRA. Supreme clearing weapon.
PASHUPATA. The weapon sacred to Shiva.
PINAKA. Shiva's bow.
PISHACHA. Missile belonging to the Pisachas.
PITRYIA. Connected with the ancestors (Pittris).
PRAMA THANA. The churner.
PRASHAMANA. Weapon of destruction.
PRASWAPRANA. To do with inhaling the vital airs.
PRATIHARDARA. That which prevents the effects of other weapons.
PURANG MUKHA. Having the face averted.

Q

R

RABHASA. The desolator.
RATI. Weapon of enjoyment.
RUCHIRA. The approving weapon.
RUDRA. Weapon sacred to Rudra (Shiva).

S

SAMVARTTA. The covering weapon.
SANDHANA. The arm weapon.
SANTAPANA. One of the arrows of Kamadeva, the God of Love, a weapon that scorches and burns up.
SARICHIMALI. That which has force.
SARPA-NATHA. Lord of serpents.
SATYA-ASTRA. The existence weapon.
SATYAKIRTI. The justly famed.
SAURA. The heroic weapon.
SHAKTIS. Powers.
SHAKUNA. The vulture-shaped.
SHANKARA. The cause of welfare—Shiva's weapon.
SHATAVAKTRA. Hundred mouthed.
SHITESU. A sharp arrow.
SHATODARA. The hundred-bellied.
SHOSHANA. A weapon used to dry up water and counteract the VARSHANA weapon, *q. v.*
SHUCHIVANU. The pure-handed.
SHUSKA. The dry weapon.
SOMASTRA. The dew weapon.
SOUMANVA. With a controlled mind.
SUNABHUKA. Of fine navel.
SWAPANA. To do with the act of sleeping.
SWANABHUKA. Rich-navelled.

T

TRIMBHAKA. The gaper.
TWASHTRA. Possessing the power of Twashtra, architect of the gods.

U

USIRATNA. A scimitar.

V

VARSHANA. Rain-producing weapon.
VARUNA PASHA. Net of Varuna.
VATRA. Caused by wind (Vatri " Blower ").
VAYUVYA. Having the power of the wind.
VIDDANA. Weapon that rends or tears asunder.
VIDHUTA. The strongly vibrating.
VIDYA DHARA. Weapon from the demi-gods.
VILAPANA. Weapon causing wailing.
VIMALA. The pure.
VINIDRA. The somniferous.
VISHNU DISCUS. Disc of Vishnu.

W

X

Y

Y. YOGANDHARA. The united.

Z

FLOWERS AND TREES

(*Note :* Many of the following have no English equivalent—wherever possible the Latin term is given.)

A

AMLAKA. A many-branched shrub resembling hemlock. Phyllanthus Emblica.
ANKOTHA. Allangirium Hexapetalum.
ARISTA. Soap plant—Sapindus Saponeria.
ASANA. Indian Almond—Terminalia Alata Tomentosa.
ASHOKA. A coconut-like tree.
ASHWA--KARNA. Vatica Robusta.
ASHWA-LAGNA. Saul tree.

GLOSSARY

B

BADRI or VADRI. Jujube plant—Zixyphus Jujuba.
BHANDUKA. Calosanthes Indica.
BHAVYA. A small fruit tree allied to the Magnolia-sillenia Speciosa.
BILWA. A citrus fruit used in the manufacture of sherbet.
BURGAD. Banyan tree—Ficus bengalensis. L.

C

CHAMPAKA. A species of magnolia.

D

DEVA PARU. A variety of pine.
DEVA PARNA. Medicinal plant (the Divine Leaf).
DHANWARIA. A special of twining plant—Echites Antidy Senteric.
DHARA. A variety of Acacia.
DHATRI. Sterospermum Aciderifolium.
DHUVA. One of the Acacia family.
DURVA GRASS. Bent grass. Panicum Dactylon.

E

F

G

GULAK. A resinous tree, fragments of which are put into the water in a loshta for ceremonial purposes.

H

I

J

JAMBU. Rose apple. Eugenia Jamboliera.
JAMNU. Bird cherry. Prunus padus. L.

K

KAMRANGA. Averrhoa carambola.
KAPITHA. Jack fruit.
KARNIKARA. Pterospermum Acerifolium.
KASANARI. Liquorice plant. Gmelina Arborea.
KEDUMBRA. A tree with orange-coloured fragrant flowers.
KUJAJA. A medicinal tree.
KURAKA. Olivanum tree. Boswellia Thorifera.
KUSHA or DARBHA GRASS. Sacred grass used in religious ceremonies. A grass of long stalks and pointed leaves like rushes. Desmostachya Bipennata.

GLOSSARY

L

LODHRA. Simplocos Racemosa. The bark of this tree is used for dye.

M

MADHUCA. Illipi butter tree. Bossia Latifolia.
MADHURA. Perennial Jasmine.
MALLIKA. Evening Jasmine.
MANGO. Mangifera Indica.

N

NARCAL GRASS. A species of reed. Phragmites Karka Trin.
NIMBA. Acadirachta Indica. A tree with bitter fruits, the leaves of which are chewed at funerals.
NIPA. A species of Kedumbra tree, *q. v.* Nauclea Cadamba.

O

P

PADMAKA. A kind of fir.
PALASA or PALASHA. Bread fruit. Butea Frondosa.
PANASA. Arto Carpus Integrifolia.
PATALA. Tropical evergreen climbing plant.
PIPPALA. Ficus Religiosa. Sacred Fig Tree.
PIYALA. Chrongua.
PLAKSHA. Ficus Infectoria. Waved-leaf fig tree.

Q

R

S

SALA or SHALA TREE. Sal tree. Shorea Robusta.
SALLAKA. Gum tree. Bignonia Indica.
SARPAT GRASS. One of the sugar canes. Saccharium Bengalense Retz. (S. Sara Roxb.)
SILLEA. A large bamboo. Cephalostashyum Capitatum Munro.
SHINGSAPA. An Ashoka, *q. v.* Dattergia Sisu.

T

TALA. A kind of palm, Borassus Flabelliformis.
TILAKA. A tree with beautiful flowers similar to the Sesamum plant.
TINDURA. Persimmon.
TINISHA. A climber with purple or white flowers.

U

V

VADRI. (See Badri.)
VARANA. Sacred medicinal tree. Cratœva Tapia.
VETRA. Ornamental palm.
VETTAS. Rattan cane. Calamus rotamg. L.
VIJAKA. Citron tree.

W

X

Y

Z

दिनांक Date	उधारकर्ता की संख्या Borrower's No.	दिनांक Date	उधारकर्ता की संख्या Borrower's No.
3/1/92	72/5		
	72/5		
	23/5		
28/12/95	655/5		

